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PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

THE TIMBERDALE TWINS.

By HOWARD AUSTIN.



The Twins found it was not easy to drag her out of the water. However, this was done by means of a ladder, placed across the hole. The Twins walked along the ladder, and lifted Ida out.

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PLUCK AND LUCK

Stories of Adventure

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THE TIMBERDALE TWINS

OR,

THE BOY CHAMPION SKATERS OF HERON LAKE

By HOWARD AUSTIN

CHAPTER I.

JOE REED'S NEWS—THE SKATING PARTY.

"Put away that ball!" cried Joe Reed, a bright-faced boy of fifteen, as he came running up to the crowd.

He spoke to a group of boys, who had been keeping themselves warm by throwing a ball from one to another.

To keep themselves from freezing some exercise was certainly needed, for the thermometer stood at zero, and there was a keen wind blowing.

The lad who had the ball when Joe Reed spoke held it, instead of sending it on its way.

"Why should he put away the ball, I want to know, Reed, if you can show me something better to do."

"Oh, don't mind him!" cried several of the group.

"Mind Joe Reed?" laughed another boy; "I should guess not! He doesn't know what he's talking about."

"Well," drawled Joe Reed, "I know one thing that you don't."

"And what's that?"

"The lake's frozen over."

"Heron Lake?"

"I don't know any other in these parts."

The boy who held the ball put it in his pocket, and he, together with his companions, crowded around Joe Reed. He had become quite an attractive personage.

"You're not jollying us, are you, Reed?"

"I'm telling you what I saw. I passed by Heron Lake an hour or so ago, and it was frozen over from end to end."

"Guess it won't bear, though."

"That I can't say, but there's an easy way to find out."

"How?"

"Get on it."

"And go to the bottom?"

"Pshaw! you're too fat to sink, anyway."

"Say, we'll go up to the lake at once!" shouted Bob Fuller, passing over the accusation of fatness which had been made against him.

This was a standing joke against Bob, or "Fatty" Fuller, to give him his usual title, and as he was a good-tempered boy he seldom took any notice when an allusion was made to his size.

"We'll get some lunch," said Harry Pierce, "and make a day of it."

"Hurrah! that's the way to talk. Skip to your homes, lads," cried Mark Deane, who looked upon himself as a sort of leader, "and get your skates, and in fifteen minutes we'll meet here again."

The boys dispersed instantly in all directions. None of them had far to go. They lived in the little town of Timberdale, in Maine, the houses of which clustered together. Therefore, the time suggested by Mark Dane was quite sufficient.

It was the end of the year, so the boys had a short vacation, and they meant to make the most of it.

Delighted with the prospect before them, they came running up to the meeting-place, and some of them brought their sisters with them.

The girls had insisted on going, for the girls of Timberdale were nearly as much at home on skates as the boys.

"Oh, what fun we'll have!" cried Jenny Pierce, Harry's sister.

"We won't do a thing to the ice," laughed Joe Reed.

"Take care the ice doesn't do something to you," was the girl's response.

Joe laughed as loud as the others, but all at once a strange look came on his face.

"Say!" he cried.

"Well?"

"What are we going to do? The Twins are missing."

"That's so. What a pity! Let's find them," were some of the comments that were instantly made.

Mark Deane's lip curled.

"Guess the Twins don't own the earth, do they?" he asked, with a sneer that quite disfigured his handsome face.

"No, but they own Timberdale," was Joe Reed's quick reply.

"They don't own me—I know that," answered Mark Deane, "and I'm going right on, if I have to go by myself."

"Besides," said Harry Pierce, "it's no good looking for them. They went out early with their guns, saying they were going to try to shoot some gray squirrels."

"Try!" echoed Mark Deane, sneeringly. "And that's about all it will amount to, I'm thinking."

"Well, I'm sorry they're not here," said Joe Reed; "but we mustn't waste time. We have a good walk before us."

"We must take Ida!" cried Annie Reed. "I won't go if she doesn't."

"That's an awful prospect, but we'll try and live through it," retorted Joe.

He was devoted to his sister, but, boy-like, he was fond of teasing her.

As Ida Lester's home was on the way, it was decided that she should be called for.

There was no need, however, to do this, for the noise made by the skating party as it approached was so great that both Ida and her mother came to the door to see what was the cause of it.

"Oh! they're going skating, mother," cried Ida, clapping her hands. "How jolly. Wait for me, I'll go with you. I won't be a minute."

"I don't think I would like you to go, my dear," said Mrs. Lester, doubtfully. "I have not heard of any skating having taken place this winter, and I question if the ice is very safe."

"We are going to test it, Mrs. Lester," said Joe Reed, "before anyone ventures to skate."

"How will you do that, Joe?"

"We shall roll 'Fatty' Fuller on the lake. If he doesn't go through the ice it's all right."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed everybody.

"Mrs. Lester," said Mark Deane, coming forward and speaking seriously, "if you will trust Ida to me I will answer for her safety. No one shall skate unless the ice is quite strong."

"Oh! I must go, mother," cried Ida. "Do say 'yes.'"

"I suppose it must be yes, my dear, though I don't know if I'm doing right. Mark, I rely on you to bring her home safely."

"You may depend upon me, Mrs. Lester."

The window had to be satisfied with this assurance, and so Ida was able to join her friends.

They were delighted to have her with them, for she was a general favorite, both on account of her good looks and the kindness of her nature.

The cold air brought the roses into her cheeks, and Mark Deane was not the only boy there who thought the merry-faced Ida, with the golden curls, was the prettiest girl in Timberdale.

The trail led through the forest, and more than once Ida stopped, and the others halted, too. They thought perhaps she was tired, but Mark Deane held a different opinion.

"What on earth are you stopping for every few yards, Ida?" he asked, in a vexed tone.

"I was listening."

"For what?"

"Thought I might hear a gunshot. Then I should know the Twins were near."

"Just as I thought," muttered Mark. "Well, she won't see much of those two fellows to-day, for Pierce told me they'd gone in the opposite direction to this."

Harry Pierce repeated this information for Ida's benefit, and she showed she was not pleased to hear it.

"It can't be helped," she remarked, "though I'm very sorry."

Mark Deane was delighted. Mrs. Lester had confided Ida to his care, and for one day, at least, it seemed as if she belonged to him.

"Guess I can take care of you as well as anybody else, Ida," he said. "Don't you think I can?"

"I imagine I can take care of myself," answered the girl, saucily; "any way. I'm going to try."

"Look! Look!" cried Joe Reed, excitedly, pointing through the trees. "Didn't I tell you so?"

"Sure enough, the lake's frozen over," said Harry Pierce. "You're right, so far."

There was no doubt that a sheet of ice covered the surface of the water, for the white coating the lake wore glistened beneath the winter sun.

They were all too excited to walk now. The entire party broke into a run, and jumping over logs and other obstacles, they raced along, not stopping until they reached the lake.

Joe Reed winked at Harry Pierce, pointing to "Fatty" Fuller as he did so.

Harry understood these signs, and in an instant he and Joe had seized the unlucky "Fatty," and were hurrying him down the banks towards the ice.

"Let me go!" cried "Fatty," struggling to free himself. "Let me go, I say!"

"No, no."

"I'll kill you when I'm free."

"Can't help that," said Joe, laughingly. "A promise is a promise, and has to be kept. I promised Mrs. Lester I'd test the ice, and I'm going to do it. Over with him, Harry!"

In a moment "Fatty" was off his feet on the ground.

In a moment he was on the ice, spinning over it like a rolling-pin with the impetus given to him by his two tormentors.

"Boys and girls!" cried Joe, putting himself into a theatrical attitude, "the ice bears the fat man. I declare it quite safe."

CHAPTER II.

THE TIMBERDALE TWINS APPEAR—A GREAT RACE.

These words were received with a shout of laughter from the young people, who were busily engaged in fixing on their skates.

They were chatting gaily, everybody speaking at once, as it were, when Ida Lester called their attention to something moving on the surface of the lake.

"Look over there!" she exclaimed, "right at the far end! I am sure I can see figures on the ice."

All the boys and girls fixed their eyes in the direction indicated by the girl.

"Who can they be?" asked more than one of the spectators.

"By jingo! it's the Twins!" shouted Joe Reed, who was gifted with unusually keen sight. "I'm dead sure it's the Twins."

Very soon agreement with Joe Reed was general, and, with the exception of Mark Deane, all were delighted at this unlooked-for occurrence.

The boys began to shout to them.

"You are wasting your breath," said Ida! "they can't hear you at such a distance."

"They will see us and come here," remarked her friend, Annie.

"Why don't we go over to them? That's the quickest way. I'm going, I know that."

"I'll race anybody across the ice," shouted Mark Deane. "Who'll skate against me?"

"Why, the whole lot of us," cried Joe Reed. "Why not? Guess you're nothing great. You don't scare me, anyway."

"Come on, then," retorted Mark, a flash of anger passing over his face.

The whole crowd started.

It may be imagined that it soon broke up. The good skaters soon left the others far behind. Many fell on the ice, and very soon Joe Reed and Mark Deane led the party, being fully two hundred yards in advance.

Joe struggled hard to reach the Twins first, but he was unable to overhaul Mark, who led him at the finish by twenty yards.

"You don't think quite so much of yourself now, do you, Joe?" asked Mark, highly delighted at his victory.

"I never make excuses," answered Joe. "You beat me, that's enough." Then he turned to the Twins, who had looked on silently. "Why, Frank, Fred, what brings you here? Thought you'd gone out gunning."

"So we did," replied Frank Fay, "but we took care to bring our skates with us. As we didn't see a single gray squirrel we came on the ice. That's all there is to it."

"We'll have great sport," exclaimed Fred Fay, his brother. "This is luck and no mistake, to meet the whole lot of you."

The Twins showed by their faces how pleased they were to fall in with their companions from the village. What delighted one always made the other glad. Their tastes, as well as their looks, were almost identical.

One, Frank, was blonde, the other, Fred, dark, but their features were cast in one mold, and their build was the same.

Their father, Farmer Fay, of Timberdale, declared he could not tell them apart when their caps were pulled down so as to hide their hair.

On such occasions, instead of addressing the boy before him as Frank or Fred, he always called him in this fashion: "Come here, you Twins."

"I beat him, Ida," cried Mark Deane, as the girl came up. "He had no show against me."

"Guess you think you could beat anybody here," said Fred Fay.

"If I did I shouldn't be far wrong."

"Oh! we'll soon see about that. I'll take you on myself."

"Just let me get my breath and I'm your man," answered Mark. "What distance do you want to go?"

"Any you like."

"Then I propose we go from here across the lake to that big tree and back to this point. I'd say it was about two miles."

"That's a bargain," answered Fred, gayly. "Say when you're ready and we'll start."

The rest of the skaters, hearing of this race, collected together to talk over the chances of the two competitors.

The majority of the boys and girls favored Fred Fay, not because they had ever seen a contest between him and Mark Deane, but on general principles. They could not imagine how either of the Twins could be defeated at anything in which they engaged.

Joe Reed started the two boys.

Neck and neck they raced for the first quarter of a mile.

"Mark's going well," said Harry Pierce. "He's giving Fred a good race."

"Oh, Fred doesn't need to exert himself yet," answered Frank Fay.

"Why, Mark's drawing away from Fred!" exclaimed Ida Lester, astounded at what she saw.

It was difficult to judge how far Mark was ahead, but it was certain that he was not less than fifty yards in advance, and, so far as could be seen, he was continually increasing his lead.

The excitement was great now, for the two boys were approaching the opposite side of the lake where the turn for home would have to be made.

Quick as lightning Mark flew around, coming back towards his companions at a great pace.

Fred was on the homestretch, too, now, but he had lost if anything, instead of gaining.

For the first time Frank Fay began to look anxious. That his brother should be beaten was bad enough, but that Mark Deane should be the one to triumph over him made matters ten times worse. Enough has been said to show that the feeling between the Twins and Mark was not a cordial one.

"The race is over," cried Joe Reed, as Mark approached; "or, rather, there isn't any race at all. There's only one in it."

"I'm very sorry, Frank," said Ida. "I wanted Fred to win."

"Yes, and he will!" shouted Frank, in triumphant tones. "Look at him now. He's letting himself go."

Fred Fay fairly astonished everybody.

He was coming along now, with his hands clasped behind his back, seemingly with so little effort that it was wonderful how he could attain such a high rate of speed.

He showed himself a perfect skater, using little muscular exertion, merely allowing the impelling motion to proceed from the mechanical impulse of the body, thrown in such a position as to regulate the impulse.

"Fred wins! Fred wins!" cried the boys, and the shrill cries of the delighted girls mingled with those shouts.

"I knew he would," said Frank, calmly.

Mark had been skating gracefully and well before. He seemed to get rattled now, and making frantic efforts to maintain his lead, came over the ice with his arms waving in the air like the sails of a windmill, cutting anything but a pretty figure he did.

Despite his efforts Fred gained.

They were almost abreast now. Then a great cry proclaimed that Fred had passed Mark, and was leading.

At each stride Fred Fay gained, until he was twenty yards ahead, and it was only one hundred to the winning post.

Frank, delighted, was encouraging his brother by his cries, and there was a perfect babel of sound, for every boy and girl there had something to say.

Then, suddenly, came a crash.

Fred Fay, to everyone's amazement, lay full length on the ice on which he had fallen headlong, and Mark Deane, taking advantage of the accident, passed his prostrate foe, and in a few seconds glided by the winning post.

Without stopping he came round and joined the crowd, who hurried over to where Fred lay.

"I think I won," he said, with a smile.

"Won!"

"Yes, Joe Reed," answered Mark, triumphantly. "The one who passes the post first is generally the winner, I believe. Of course," he added, sarcastically, "the rules may have been changed to oblige the Twins, so that the last man may be called the winner."

"You wouldn't have won if Fred hadn't fallen," retorted Ida.

"Perhaps not, my dear Ida," answered Mark, pleasantly. "Only let me point out this to you, Ida, that the man who falls is a bad skater and deserves to lose."

This was more than Fred could endure.

"You taunt me," he cried. "Why, you had no chance with me. As for my falling, that's easily explained."

Mark laughed mockingly.

"My falling," continued Fred, "had nothing to do with any want of skill. Something was wrong with the lever of my skate and it came off; that's all there is to it. If you don't believe me, look there," saying which Fred pointed to the skate which, flying off his foot, had glided to a considerable distance from where he had fallen.

"And look here, Mark Deane," added Fred, "I'll race you again whenever and wherever you like."

"And if he doesn't," Frank Fay put in, "I'm willing to oblige you at any time."

"There's no need of shouting," said Mark, pettishly. "I hear you, and I'm not afraid of either of you. As soon as you like, I say, and for anything you please. You can't expect me to go over the ground again now. That isn't reasonable."

"And I don't ask it. We'll meet in Timberdale and fix a time and place."

"And now what shall we do?" said Frank Fay.

"Why, have lunch," said "Fatty" Fuller. "I'm too hungry for anything."

"We must get across the lake, then, to where our grips are."

"We'll build a fire and make some coffee," cried Ida.

"We haven't any."

"Oh, yes, we have, Joe. I brought some. Girls know what to do."

"Stop!" cried Joe Reed, just as the party was starting.

"What is it?"

"I have a proposition to make."

"Be quick with it, then."

"We'll have a race back to where we left our grips. The one who gets there last shall build the fire and make coffee for us all."

"Hurrah! That's great! Come on!"

And instantly Frank Fay started, followed by his brother and Ida. The others were not far behind.

All were so eager to reach the finishing point first, no one looked back.

They arrived at the spot in a bunch, for the boys had slowed down so as to keep the girls company, and when they reached the bank all looked around at once.

An elephantine figure was seen coming across the ice with a movement as graceful as that of a duck.

It was "Fatty" Fuller, and as soon as he landed they set him to work to collect wood for his fire.

"Keep an eye on the grips, girls!" cried Joe Reed. "He'll eat the lot if you give him a chance."

"Fatty" worked hard, for he was ravenous, and thought, therefore, the sooner his task was finished, the quicker he would be able to satisfy his appetite.

The blazing fire soon boiled the coffee.

There was a scarcity of cups—only two in fact—but this did not interfere with the enjoyment of the merry party grouped around the fire. The cups passed from hand to hand, and the coffee disappeared rapidly, and so did the pie they had brought with them.

Before going home they went on the ice again.

Fred, Frank and Ida joined hands and skated across the lake, making a very pretty and graceful picture, with the girl in the middle.

Mark Deane stood looking on with a face that showed how angry he was.

"She's a strange girl," he said, speaking to himself, but aloud. "She's fond of those Twins, but she doesn't seem to like one better than the other."

"But she likes them both better than she does you," laughed Joe Reed, as he skated away.

So Mark Deane, despite his victory, did not reach Timberdale in a happy frame of mind.

CHAPTER III.

THE SKATING CARNIVAL—A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT.

That same night Mark Deane called on his friend, Howard Robson, the schoolmaster.

Mr. Robson was not much over twenty, and he and Mark were fast friends.

"So you've all been skating to-day. I heard about it," said the schoolmaster. "All got back safe?"

"Yes."

"Nothing happened to anybody, not even to the Twins?"

"Nothing, not even to the Twins," repeated Mark. "Oh, yes, I'm forgetting, something did happen to one of them."

"What was that?" asked the schoolmaster, eagerly.

"That will do him good," he said. "He won't crow quite so loud. Tell me all about it."

He was an attentive listener to Mark's story, not interrupting him once.

"So, they've challenged you to race again?"

"Yes, and I agreed."

"You were wrong there."

"Why?"

"Because next time they will beat you."

Mark looked angry.

"You don't seem to have a very high opinion of me, Mr. Robson."

"I'm very fond of you, Mark, but that doesn't blind my eyes to the fact that you're not Fred Fay's equal on the ice. It is perfectly clear that he would have beaten you to-day but for the accident that happened to him."

"I admit that."

"Then why try again?"

"Because it doesn't follow that he can do the same thing next time. I can give you good reasons for what I say."

"Well, do so."

"To begin with, I've had little practice lately."

"Neither has Fred Fay. To-day was the first day he has been on the ice this year."

"Yes, but you forget that he was skating all last winter, whilst I never had the skates on my feet. I was down South."

"That's a good reason, Mark," said the schoolmaster, after a moment's thought. "Now for your other reason. Is it as good?"

"Better. Fred's skates were in perfect order. I looked and I saw that the blades had just been sharpened. Mine were perfectly blunt, and half the time instead of biting the ice, they slipped along the surface. That made me lose a lot of ground and besides kept me from going at full speed. I was afraid to do so. Just you give me a week's practice on a good pair of skates, and I tell you there's no one in Timberdale can beat me."

"I'll go up to the lake with you to-morrow, and see what you can do. Get your skates sharpened first thing in the morning, and we'll have some practice together."

"Do you skate?" asked Mark, somewhat surprised.

"Yes, a little," answered the schoolmaster, with a queer look on his face. "Yes, I skate a little, and I'll give you good advice, coach you, in fact. I take a great interest in you, Mark."

"You want me to win, Mr. Robson?"

"I want to see those Twins beaten," answered the schoolmaster, sharply. "I'm going to promise you something if you can manage to do it."

"What is it?" cried Mark, eagerly.

"I'll take you to New York with me for a week."

"Now I know I'll win!" cried Mark, half crazy at the prospect of visiting the metropolis, which he had not seen since he was a child.

The next morning found Mark and the schoolmaster at Heron Lake.

They did not go together, because Howard Robson thought it was not advisable that every one should know he was coaching Mark.

They met at a part of the lake which was almost inclosed by tall trees, and in this circle felt themselves safe from observation.

About twice around this circle made a mile as near as they could judge.

"Now, Mark," said the schoolmaster, "let us see what you can do. Come!"

"Shall I keep close to you, sir?" asked Mark, "or go as fast as I please, and see how far I can leave you behind?"

"See how far you can leave me behind."

"Here goes then!" cried Mark, dashing away.

Mark skated at a great rate only to find the schoolmaster at his elbow.

"I'm surprised, Mr. Robson," he said, slowing down. "You told me you skated a little."

"Well, don't I?"

"Why, you're a great skater."

"If I am, that's all the more reason why I shall be able to train you."

Eventually the schoolmaster left Mark, telling him he was perfectly satisfied with his performance, and that if he skated every day for a week, he need fear nobody in the neighborhood.

The boys and girls all went to Mr. Robson to tell him they wanted to arrange some skating races, and to ask him to help them in doing so.

"I shall be very pleased," he said. "When do you want to race?"

"This day week, sir," said Joe Reed. "That suits everybody, doesn't it?"

"Yes, yes," they cried.

"And how many races do you want?"

"We think, sir," answered Frank Fay, "that there should be four races."

"Have you agreed on the distances?"

"Yes. Fred will tell you."

"Now, Fred Fay."

"The first race, sir, we think, should be one hundred yards dash from a standing start. The second one mile, and the third five miles."

"I should think it was!" cried Ida Lester. "Fred, I'm ashamed of you! The fourth race is to be three hundred yards, Mr. Robson, for the girls."

"Do you skate?"

"Do we skate?" asked Ida, indignantly. "Yes, sir; better than some of the boys, too, as you will say when you see us; don't we, Annie?"

"We beat Bob Fuller, anyway," said Annie Reed.

Everybody laughed except "Fatty" Fuller, and he, too, joined in the mirth very speedily.

"The program is a good one," said the schoolmaster, "but something is required to make the races a success."

"What is that?"

"Good ice. Now, I advise you all to go up to the lake the day before the race, measure the track off, and mark the distances. Then sweep the ice thoroughly."

"This shall be done, I promise you," said Frank Fay.

"Very well. I will see if I can't offer some prizes for you."

Perfectly delighted, the young people went away, and for a whole week nothing was talked of in Timberdale but the skating carnival that was to be held on the lake.

The schoolmaster succeeded very well in obtaining subscriptions towards purchasing prizes, and it was announced that a handsome silver medal would be given to the winner of the five-mile race, a pair of skates of the best make to the winner of the mile race, a fishing rod for the one hundred yards dash, and a very fine album for the girls.

Mark Deane said he would compete in two races, the one mile and the five miles, and the Timberdale Twins announced their intention of taking part in the same contests.

"Mark says he's sure to win," said Joe Reed, as he and the Twins went up to the lake on the day of the race.

"Oh, what he says amounts to nothing," replied Frank Fay. "You saw how Fred ran away from him, and he can do it again."

"And if I can do it," said Fred Fay, "so can Frank."

"He claims his skates were blunt," Joe continued.

"Blunt or sharp, Joe, I don't fear him. Hurrah! Here's the lake, and what a great day it is! Perfect!"

Frank's praise of the weather was justified. It was a grand day for skating.

The sky was clear, the sun was shining brightly, and there was no wind.

The number of people who had assembled around the lake was surprising. It was evident that the races had been well advertised.

Howard Robson seemed to be the boss of everything.

He was to act as a starter and judge.

"Keep your eye on the schoolmaster," said Joe Reed to the Twins. "If he can favor Mark Deane in any way, he will."

"We won't give him the chance."

"The first race!" cried the schoolmaster at this point, "is one mile. Those who want to compete come to the starting point at once."

Joe Reed, Mark Deane, and the Twins hurried up at once.

"Attend to me, boys," said Mr. Robson, "you have to go twice round the track. I shall start you at the word go! Are you ready?"

The schoolmaster waited a moment. None of the boys made any remark, so he said sharply: "Go!" and started the race.

They got off well together, Joe Reed being the first to break away and show in front.

For more than half a mile Joe kept ahead. Then the tremendous pace began to tell on him, and he fell back towards the others.

At three-quarters of a mile, Mark, Frank and Fred were abreast, with Joe some distance behind.

Then the Twins forged ahead, Mark struggling hard to maintain his position.

Frank Fay got ahead of his brother as the winning post was neared, and Fred dropped back towards Mark Deane.

"Frank Fay wins!" was the shout now from hundreds of throats.

But an instant later another cry was heard. The ice in the center of the lake cracked, and just as the Twins were nearing the winning post they saw Ida disappear beneath the ice.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RESCUE—HOWARD ROBSON GIVES THE RACE TO MARK DEANE.

"Help, help!" cried Ida, loudly.

There was a loud shout from the spectators, who were horror stricken at what had happened. They were so far from the girl that they were not able to give her any assistance.

Frank and Fred had not only heard the girl's imploring cry, but they had seen her fall through the broken ice.

Frank's mind was made up on the instant.

"Win the race, Fred!" he shouted to his brother. "I'll save Ida!"

Saying this, he wheeled around and dashed across the ice to where Ida was.

Fred was indignant with his brother for thinking he would sacrifice Ida in order to beat Mark Deane.

He said nothing, but also turning, he followed hard on Frank's track.

Ida sunk below the water once, and as she came to the surface again, she clung with all the desperation such extreme perils give a person, to the ice around her.

As she did so, it crumbled away in her fingers, for at the edges it was thin.

"If you go to Ida, Frank," said Fred, "you will fall through the ice, too. It's not strong enough to bear you."

"You here!" exclaimed Frank.

"Of course, I am."

"Frank! Fred! I can't keep afloat much longer," gasped Ida. "My strength is almost gone."

The icy coldness of the water of the lake was doing its work quickly, as the boys saw.

"If we only had a rope," cried Frank.

"I'll get one."

"Be quick, then, Fred."

Fred dashed off towards the cluster of wagon and carriages, which had brought the spectators to the lake. As he skated he shouted: "Has anyone a rope? Quick! It's a matter of life and death!"

A farmer ran forward instantly.

"I was bringin' this along, lad. Guessed you would want it."

The rope was thrown to Ida, and she managed to take hold of it. There was no danger now of her drowning, so long as she grasped the cord, but the Twins found it was not easy to drag her out of the water. However, this was soon done, by means of a long ladder which was placed across the ice. The Twins walked along the ladder, and lifted Ida out of the lake.

The crowd gave a great cheer when it saw that she was safe.

The boys and girls thronged around her, glad to see her amongst them again.

"Take her home, Annie," said Frank Fay. "And the sooner you get there the better. Don't stay here a moment, Ida, you run a great risk if you do."

The girl's high spirits had not left her.

"Water won't hurt anyone, Frank," she laughed. "I feel like a Newfoundland dog," she added. "Guess I'll do the same as they do."

Quickly she shook her wet skirts, scattering drops of water all around amongst her friends.

"I have no favorites," she said, gaily, "you shall all share alike."

Some of the farmers' wives came across the ice at this moment, and being sensible people, they cut short this talk.

"You laugh now, Ida," said one, "but you'll be shivering and shaking soon. Come with me, dear. My husband will drive you back to your mother's house."

Annie Reed went with her, and as soon as the girls had gone, everyone began to ask how it was that there was a hole in the ice. It was certain that some one must have made it, for Ida's weight would never have crashed through unless it had been broken before.

"Whoever did it ought to have known better," said Frank Fay, indignantly.

"What's that you are saying?" asked Howard Robson, the schoolmaster, coming up quickly.

"We were talking about the hole in the ice through which Ida fell, sir," said Frank.

"I made that yesterday," answered the schoolmaster.

"You made it, sir?"

"Yes. I drew a lot of water through it to flood the track along which you raced to-day. If I hadn't do you imagine you would have had such a fine surface? But I think you said, Fay, that whoever did it ought to have known better. Were those your words?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now you know I did it, perhaps you'll be good enough to take them back."

"You don't quite understand me, Mr. Robson," said Frank, with perfect coolness, looking the schoolmaster in the face. "I don't object to the hole you made, because you did it for a very necessary purpose, but I think you should have put up a board or post to indicate danger. If you had done so Ida would have been saved her cold bath."

The schoolmaster was not a good-tempered man, nor did he like Frank Fay. Indeed, of the Twins he preferred Fred, though he was not partial to either. He had a habit of showing his teeth when he was angry, and he did so now.

"So," he cried, making a hasty step towards Frank as he spoke, "you accuse me with being the cause of Ida's accident."

"I accuse you of nothing. I have said what I think quite plainly, and I don't take back a word of it."

"Bravo!" cried a sympathizer.

"Who spoke?" demanded Mr. Robson, looking round angrily.

"Guess it must have been Mark Deane," answered Joe Reed, with an innocent look on his face. "Sure, it wasn't you, Mark?"

Mark growled out something, and the schoolmaster at the same moment arrived at the conclusion that it was not a very dignified proceeding on his part to be engaged in a squabble with the boys he taught.

So he walked away to the point from which the races were started, and where a considerable crowd of people had collected.

Mark Deane, the Twins, and the rest of the young people followed him.

"Now, boys," he said, "if you will be silent a minute I shall be glad, for I have something to say."

The buzz of voices ceased at once.

"We have only decided one race up to now," he said.

"Decided?" asked Frank.

"Yes, certainly. The mile race."

"Do you call that a race, sir?" inquired Joe Reed.

"Of course, I do, Reed. As judge, I award that race to Mark Deane."

There were instantly heard a number of angry cries, not only from the boys and girls, but from their fathers and mothers and their friends who stood near.

"That won't do, schoolmaster," said one tall, long-limbed farmer, stepping forward.

"I think I was appointed judge, Mr. Hopkins," said Mr. Robson, curtly.

"That's right, 'nough, but thunder, judges make mistakes just like other people."

"And you say I've made one now?"

"Surely. When Ida fell into the water, Frank Fay had the race won, an' by gosh, Fred Fay was in front of Mark Deane, too. Like brave lads, they went to save Ida, and Mark, who didn't care if Ida drowned or not, skated on and passed the post."

"Exactly," cried the schoolmaster, quickly. "He passed the post, and therefore he is the winner."

"Guess you must call that race off, schoolmaster," said Farmer Hopkins. "It's the only square thing to do. There'll be trouble if you don't. What do you say, friends?" asked the farmer, appealing to his neighbors.

They had only one opinion, and it was in agreement with his.

The schoolmaster bit his lips, for he was furious, but as he could not afford to quarrel with the people around him, most of whom belonged to Timberdale, he gave way.

"And how about the other races?" some one asked.

"We can't have the girls race," answered Harry Pierce, "with Ida and Annie away."

"Well, if we have to postpone that, we may as well put them all off," said Mr. Robson.

"Till to-morrow?" asked Mark Deane.

"Yes."

Some were disappointed at this decision, but most of the boys and girls were glad, because they wanted Ida and Annie to share in the fun. They made up merry parties, skating in all directions over the ice, meeting with falls and other mishaps, but enjoying themselves thoroughly in spite of everything.

CHAPTER V.

THE QUARREL IN THE WOODS—THE FIGHT INTERRUPTED.

Frank and Fred went home together.

"We will call at Ida's and see her."

"You won't see her, I'm thinking, Frank."

"Why not?"

"Because her mother is sure to send her to bed. She will be so afraid of her taking cold."

"That's so. Anyway, we must go and inquire how she is. Do you know, Fred, she had a much narrower escape than most people imagine?"

"I don't think there was any real danger, Frank. We were bound to pull her out."

"That's right enough. But supposing when she fell through the hole, she had come to the top under the strong ice? In that case she would have been drowned without a doubt."

"By Jingo, that's true! I won't forget the schoolmaster's carelessness and what it might have led to."

"Listen!" cried Frank, suddenly, putting his hand on his brother's arm to stop him.

"Voices!" answered Fred. "Talking pretty loud, too. We'll hurry up and see what's going on."

The boys ran through the woods, leaping over low bushes and fallen timber that lay in their way, until they came to a group of boys who were engaged in an excited discussion.

The two principals appeared to be Joe Reed and Mark Deane.

They were glaring at each other fiercely, and Mark, especially, seemed to be in a great passion.

"Hello! What's up?" asked Frank.

"What's that to you?" retorted Mark, angrily. "You leave us to settle this affair our own way. And you, too, Fred Fay. We can do without you, too. You twins are not everybody."

"He's in a temper, Frank," said Joe Reed, "because I've been giving him a bit of my mind. Just a little plain speaking, you know."

"But there must be some reason for it, Joe."

"You bet there is. I was telling him he ought to be ashamed of himself for not trying to save Ida Lester. He thought more of the race than he did of her."

"And I say it's not true!" shouted Mark, fiercely. "I think more of Ida than the whole lot of you."

"You have a strange way of showing it," said Fred, sarcastically. "Perhaps you thought a cold bath at this season of the year would do her good, and that as she was enjoying herself so much in the water you would let her stay there."

"I didn't know she was in the water."

"What?"

"I say I didn't know where she was till the race was over."

Fred took off his cap, and went up to "Fatty" Fuller with it in his hand.

"Fatty" looked at him wonderingly.

"Keep your cap, Fred," he said.

"How much will you give, 'Fatty'?" said Fred, with a perfectly serious face. "I'm taking up a collection. We must buy Mark Deane some spectacles, for it's evident he can't see further than his nose."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the boys.

"And while you're about it, Fred," cried Joe Reed, "add an ear trumpet, too. Ida shouted 'Help!' pretty loudly. As Deane didn't hear her, it's a sure thing he must be deaf."

These taunts were more than Mark could endure, so he made a rush at Joe Reed, aiming a well-directed blow at him as he did so. Frank Fay had seen what was coming, so he pushed Mark aside, causing him to roll over on the snow.

"We don't want any fighting here," said Frank.

"You don't want any fighting!" repeated Mark, as he rose to his feet.

He was perfectly livid now, being beside himself with rage.

"You will have fighting, Frank Fay, whether you want it or not."

"Oh! Go and fight, 'Fatty,'" cried Fred Fay; "he's about a match for you."

Everybody except Mark laughed, for "Fatty" Fuller knew as much about fighting as a baby.

"If you take back all you've said!" exclaimed Mark, "you can have peace."

"I don't take back a word," said Joe Reed, sturdily.

"And I stick to all I've said," remarked Fred.

"And so do I," observed Frank.

Mark threw his coat on the snow.

"You can wait, Joe Reed. I'll give you a thrashing some other time. Frank Fay must take his medicine first."

"Well, if you insist," said Frank, quietly, "of course I can't help it, but don't blame me afterwards for what is about to happen. You'll be half killed, Mark Deane, before I'm through with you!"

"Kill me, kill me, if you can!" cried Mark, furiously.

"One moment," said Fred Fay quietly, laying his hand on his brother's arm as he was about to square off to Mark.

"What is it?"

"I claim an equal right to fight him."

"Perhaps you'd both like to fight me at once," sneered Mark.

"That's no more than I should expect from the Timberdale Twins."

"You can't both fight him at once," said Joe Reed, "but I think there's a way out of the difficulty."

"How?"

"Draw lots."

"In what way?"

"Write your two names on two pieces of paper. Put them in a hat and let 'Fatty' draw."

"That's a great idea."

Instantly it was put in execution, and while "Fatty" was unfolding the paper he had drawn, a dozen expectant faces were looking at him.

"Fred's lost," he said, quietly.

"Hurrah!" cried Frank, throwing his cap in the air. "So I'm to fight him."

"No, no," exclaimed "Fatty" Fuller. "You are making a mistake. Fred's name is on the paper I drew, so he has to fight. That's what I meant by saying he had lost."

"I see, you don't approve of fighting, 'Fatty.'"

Mark was impatient to commence.

He was very angry for one thing, and as he had taken off his coat, it was not pleasant to stand still, with the temperature a few degrees above zero.

"Polish him off, quickly, Fred," said Frank, carelessly. "I'm rather in a hurry."

"Walk on if you like," returned Fred. "I'll overtake you."

"If you are able to crawl," said Mark, savagely.

He rushed at Fred, and if he had managed to hit him Fred would have suffered severely.

Fred was too quick. He sprang aside, so that Mark passed him, and as he did so, Fred gave him a heavy blow on the side of his head which sent him reeling to the ground.

"He's hurt!" cried several of the boys.

"Nothing! Nothing!" answered Mark, fiercely. He was on his feet in an instant, and was preparing to rush at Fred again. The latter did not wait. He preferred to force matters, so he came to close quarters.

Mark had a fair knowledge of boxing, and was able to ward off two of the blows that were aimed at him.

"Stop!" cried a voice that made everyone turn in the direction from which the sound came, and there they saw the

schoolmaster just emerging from some trees, with a black look on his face.

Fred put his hands in his pockets and began to whistle.

"I'm surprised at you, Mark," said Mr. Robson. "I did not expect to see you in such a position. I can't say I am surprised at you, Fred, for I knew by experience what to expect."

"If you hadn't come up when you did, Mr. Robson," he replied, coolly, "some one else would have been surprised."

"And who might that be, Fred?"

"Mark Deane, sir. In less than two minutes I should have so surprised him that he wouldn't have known what he was at."

"Pshaw! I take no notice of boasting. Go home like good lads, all of you, and don't let me hear that there has been a renewal of the fight. In fact, I'll take Mark with me to prevent any such thing."

"He and his brother and Joe Reed insulted me," said Mark, sulkily.

"I've no doubt of that, and you shall get square with them, Mark, but in a very different way. Come along and I will tell you what I mean, as we are walking to Timberdale."

CHAPTER VI.

IDA ARRANGES A PARTY—AT HERON LAKE.

The other boys stopped at Ida Lester's to see how she was.

There was no need for any anxiety on her account, for the girl herself, the picture of health, opened the door.

When Mrs. Lester found out that the Twins were there, she invited them in.

"I owe my daughter's life to you two boys," she said, "and I am very grateful for what you did. Sit down, all of you. I expect you are very hungry, so you'll be glad to have some pie."

"I made it!" cried Ida.

"There, I'm too tired to eat," exclaimed Joe Reed.

"Too tired! That's nonsense. What do you mean?"

"Guess it's too heavy to lift," said Joe. "However, if you insist, I'll——"

Whilst Mrs. Lester was busying herself with the boys, Ida made signs to Fred Fay that she wanted to speak to him.

"Go into the kitchen, Fred, I'll be there in a moment. I don't think they will notice my absence."

A minute or two later she joined Fred.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

"Where are you going to-night, Fred?"

"That's a strange question. Why, I shall be home, of course."

"There's no of course about it. Can't you get out if you want to do so?"

"No chance. Pop chains me and Frank up every night."

"Oh! do talk sense. I want you to go somewhere with me to-night."

"Ah! that's different. Is Frank to come?"

"Yes."

"What a pity. I thought I should have you all to myself."

"Well, you won't. And there will be some one else, too, for Annie's coming."

"We shall be quite a party, but what are we going to do?"

"I want you to take us to the lake."

"I should think you have had enough of that, Ida, for to-day."

"I didn't have any skating, Fred, and as I'm going to try to win the girl's race to-morrow, I must have some practice. Besides, it will be jolly, won't it. There will be a fine moon, and what more do we want?"

"There's no difficulty."

"I don't see any."

"Yet you should, Ida. Your mother surely will not allow you to go."

"She won't know anything about it. She's going out to spend the evening with some friends and won't be home till very late. Annie's coming round here to keep me company and will stay the night here. So you see it's all very easy."

"What time shall we start?"

"Eight, o'clock."

"Very well. Frank and I will be waiting for you just outside the town on the road to the lake."

Fred joined his friends and soon after Ida came in without attracting any attention.

Then the boys left, and on the way home Fred told Frank of the arrangement he had made with Ida.

Frank was delighted, for he was always ready for fun of any kind.

"I tell you what, Fred, we'll take one of pop's horses and hitch him to the wagon. There's no reason why we should walk when we can ride."

"Don't you think he will hear us?"

"Not if we're careful. He'll think we are round at Joe's; we won't say we're not going there."

Farmer Fay did not hear the wagon leave, for, after his supper he fell fast asleep in his chair, having had a busy day.

The Twins reached the place where they had promised to wait for the two girls and drove the horse and wagon on to the grass underneath the trees. The moon had not yet risen, and so it was intensely dark.

The girls were not a minute behind time.

"We're first, Ida," cried Annie.

"Yes, no signs of them," answered Ida, in a disappointed tone.

"Supposing they don't come?"

"I'll never speak to them again if they play me such a trick as that."

"You don't seem in a hurry to start," said a voice from the darkness.

"That's Frank," cried Ida. "Why, here they are, and with a wagon, too. How jolly!"

The girl was so delighted that she clapped her hands.

"Ida! Ida!" exclaimed Fred, "don't make that noise unless you want all the town to come here to see us start."

This silenced Ida, and she jumped up into the wagon, sitting beside Frank, who had the reins. Annie took her seat, and off they went.

Fred sat staring right up into the sky, until the girls asked him what he was doing.

"Looking for the moon you told me about, Ida."

"You'll see it presently, Fred, for I know what I'm talking about. So long as it is out when we reach the lake that is all I care about."

"I pity the poor horse," said Annie.

"Why?"

"Because he will be cold, poor thing, waiting for us."

"He will be all right," answered Frank. "Don't you remember there's a shed near the lake where we can put him?"

Frank wisely let the horse find his own way, for it was so dark the boy could scarcely see a yard in front of him.

The road was very slippery, too, in some places, and then Fred jumped down and led the animal over the dangerous spot.

This caused delay, and it was quite nine o'clock when they turned off the road toward Heron Lake.

"Now we have a puzzle," said Frank.

"What's that?"

"To find the shed, Ida. It is not far away, but I can't see it."

"I think the best plan will be for Frank and I to get down and hunt for it," said Fred.

"And leave us here?"

"Why not, Ida? No one will run away with you."

"Except the horse. He might take it into his head to do so. Why not drive slowly along? If we do that we must find it."

"Why not sit here and wait for that beautiful moon of yours?" asked Fred.

"You won't have long to wait, Fred, for I believe it is coming from behind that dark cloud now. Don't you think so, Annie?"

"We'll do what you say, girls," remarked Frank, shaking the reins. "Keep your eyes about you."

Slowly the wagon went on, none of its occupants speaking, all being very intent on finding the shed, for they were very anxious to put on their skates and get on ice.

"I see it!" cried Fred Fay. "To the left, Frank, almost ahead of us."

As he spoke, two figures sprang out of the darkness, right up in front of the horse.

The animal balked furiously, and was badly scared. Frank had the reins tight, and tried hard to quiet the frightened creature.

"The moon! The moon!" exclaimed Ida, at this moment. "Why, it is as bright as day!"

As she spoke the startled horse commenced to plunge and rear furiously, Frank struggling desperately with it. For a minute it seemed as if the boy was getting the better of the contest.

Then, suddenly the animal swerved, and getting his bit between his teeth started off towards the lake, traveling down the steep bank at a frightful pace.

CHAPTER VII.

SKATING BY MOONLIGHT—THE TWINS LOSE THEIR SKATES.

"Sit down!" cried Frank Fay, as he struggled with the horse. "Sit down, Ida, or you'll be thrown out of the wagon."

Fred, in the back seat, sat looking on, powerless to do anything.

"Now he must stop!" said Fred.

"Yes, for the animal won't be able to keep his feet on the ice, will he, Fred?"

"I don't suppose so."

But strange to say the horse showed no signs of stopping, nor did he have any trouble in moving over the ice.

Frank was more easy in his mind now.

In front of him lay the lake, a great open space, free from all kinds of obstructions. There were no trees or posts for the wagon to be dashed against.

"Guess he'll get tired before I shall," muttered the boy, as he clung to the reins.

Fred reached over and touched his brother's arm to attract attention.

"Well, Fred, what is it?"

"Do you see where we're going?" asked Fred in anxious tones.

"Across the lake, of course."

"Frank, we're going straight to the spot where Ida fell through this morning. The ice there is very thin and if we get on it, the wagon and all of us will be in the water in a minute."

This prospect was fearful, and Frank Fay could see no way by which the danger could be averted. However, at last fortune favored the young people.

When they reached that part of the ice upon which the skating had taken place in the morning, the horse discovered that it was an extremely difficult business to move without falling. So in a few moments he stood still, and the wagon was empty in an instant.

Frank took his head and began to lead the animal back towards the shed.

"He deserves to have this whip broken over his back for playing us such a trick," said Frank.

"Don't blame him, Fred."

"Who shall I blame then?"

"Those who caused him to bolt. You saw something rise from the ground just before the horse ran away."

"Yes, I saw something, but I could not say what it was."

"I can. It was Mark Deane."

"Then you think he frightened the horse purposely?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Did you see him, Ida?"

"I saw somebody, but could not recognize him."

Annie said the same, and so Fred was alone in his opinion on the matter.

"I'm sure I'm right," he said, "and by jingo! I'll just hurry across and see if I can't find him."

Fred dashed over the lake towards the shed. He made a thorough search for Mark, but he found no one at all.

The girls, by this time, had quite recovered from their fright, so as soon as the horse was in the shed, they had their skates fixed on. The boys put on their own skates, and away they went over the great sheet of ice.

They had a fine time, and were all enjoying themselves so much that they did not wish to leave.

However, Ida and Annie knew they must reach the house before Mrs. Lester got there, so about eleven o'clock they started on the return journey.

The next day the lake was again the center of attraction, for the races, which had been postponed, were to take place.

Mark Deane was there, having arrived early in order to have some practice.

The girls had not yet come, neither had the Twins put in an appearance.

Mark skated up to a group of boys, amongst whom were Joe Reed, Harry Pierce and "Fatty" Fuller.

"The Twins must have overslept themselves," said Joe.

"So you are talking about their absence, are you?" observed Mark. "Just what I was thinking of. Shouldn't wonder if we saw nothing of them to-day."

"What makes you say that, Deane?"

"They don't like to be beaten, Reed."

"And who is to beat them?"

"I am."

"I'll believe it when I see it," said Joe.

"I'm afraid you won't have a chance."

Howard Robson, the schoolmaster, came up.

"We start the first race at eleven o'clock to the minute," he said, looking at his watch, "and it wants only ten minutes now."

"Can't you wait a little while, sir?" inquired Joe.

"Why should I?"

"Because the Twins haven't come."

"That's their lookout. The arrangements can't be altered merely to suit them. Supposing they didn't come, we should be simply standing here idle. The races will take place at the fixed time. Recollect that."

And the schoolmaster walked away.

"I believe they're coming now," cried Harry Pierce. "It looks like them in that carriage."

"So it is, and how fast they are driving!"

As soon as the Twins reached the lake they sprang from their wagon and fairly flew across the lake.

"I told you so!" exclaimed Mark, who was watching them.

"You said they wouldn't come," answered Joe.

"I said they wouldn't race, and wasn't I right, for look, Joe, they haven't any skates."

"By jingo! that's so."

"Where are your skates?" cried Harry Pierce.

"That's exactly what we want to know," replied Frank Fay, fiercely.

"We can't find them," said Fred. "We've been hunting for them the whole morning and can't make out where they've gone."

"Perhaps you're rather glad your search was not successful," sneered Mark.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I thought it was just possible you might want some excuse for keeping out of the race."

"You shall soon see."

Frank turned to the other boys.

"You're not all going to race, are you?"

"Why, there's only Joe and Mark in the first race."

"Then somebody lend me and Fred a pair of skates. It won't be exactly the same as skating on the pairs we've been accustomed to, but quite good enough to win anyway."

"Time is almost up!" shouted the schoolmaster, at this point. "In three minutes I start the race."

The boys were all eager to lend their skates to the Twins, and Frank and Fred had twenty pairs from which to make a selection.

Finally they chose two pairs, and as it did not require more than a moment to fit them on their feet, they managed to reach the post in time to start.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RACES—FRANK AND FRED SHOW WHAT THEY CAN DO.

In the mile race the competitors were the same as on the day before. They were Mark Deane, Joe Reed and the Twins.

Mark had the best of the start, getting a lead of three or four yards, but before the boys had gone two hundred yards Frank and Fred were leading.

Frank and Fred did not seem to be exerting themselves much. However, they always managed to be a few yards in front of Mark, no matter how hard he skated.

One hundred yards from the winning post Mark made a great effort, but it amounted to nothing. The Twins kept their lead, and as soon as Mark's spurt had died away Frank and Fred darted off with surprising speed, and fairly leaving Mark behind, they raced in fully twenty yards ahead.

"A dead heat!" cried Mr. Robson. "Are you two going to run it off?"

"Guess not, sir," answered Fred.

"But how about the prize? It's a pair of skates, and I don't suppose you'll want to take one skate each."

"There's no difficulty, sir," said Fred. "One of us will win the five-mile race, and will capture the medal. The one who loses will take the skates."

"Do you hear what they say, Mark?" asked Mr. Robson, quietly, to Mark Deane, who was standing near.

"Merely bluff, sir."

The one-hundred-yard dash took place, and Joe Reed won it. Then came the girls' race.

It was really a contest between Ida Lester and Annie Reed. There were two other competitors, but they had no chance against Ida and Annie.

Ida won after a fine struggle amid great cheering.

"I don't mind being beaten by you, Ida," said Annie, "but I wouldn't like anybody else to do it."

The great event of the day was now to begin—the five-mile race. This was a distance calculated to test thoroughly those who entered, and no one would have a chance of winning the race unless he possessed powers of stamina as well as speed.

The Twins, Joe Reed and Mark Deane again entered, and in addition, Harry Pierce and two other boys appeared at the starting post.

Joe Reed went to the front, and for two miles he kept there, those nearest to him being Harry Pierce and Fred Fay. Then came Mark Deane with Frank Fay, fifty yards in the rear.

Towards the close of the third mile Joe Reed and Harry Pierce began to give way, and before the fourth mile was half run Fred Fay had taken the lead.

He increased his pace, traveling as though it was a sprinting race instead of a long-distance event.

Mark looked at him anxiously.

"If he can keep up that pace I'm beaten," muttered Mark, "but I don't think he can."

Mark was right. At the end of the fourth mile Fred began to slow down, and when four miles and a half had been run Fred was in third place, with Mark leading and Frank Fay second.

The schoolmaster had a smiling face now.

Joe Reed and Fred Fay were skating close together.

"So the enemy wins this race, Fred?" said Joe.

"Looks very much like it."

"I believe I could, Joe, but I acted according to Frank's instructions. He wanted me to force the pace, and by jingo! I think I did. That settled my chances and I can't see that it's done Frank much good."

"He ought to have taken the lead when you gave it up."

"I expected he would. Great Scott! look now, Joe! This makes me mad."

Mark Deane was forging ahead fast, increasing his lead at every stride. Certainly, Mark was a fast skater; no one could deny that, and he had showed great staying powers, but he had none of the grace that Frank Fay showed in every movement.

"I won't look at them, Joe," cried Fred, savagely.

"That won't prevent Mark Deane from winning. Eh! What's this I see? By jingo! you'd better look now, Fred, if you want to see a fine sight. Look at Frank. Why, he's caught up to Mark! Now he's past him. Hurrah! He's leading by ten yards—twenty yards. He's won the race."

The spectators were too astounded to cheer, at least for a few minutes. Such wonderful skating as that just exhibited by Frank Fay had not been seen on Heron Lake before, and Mark Deane and the schoolmaster were too astonished to speak.

Mark took off his skates hurriedly and left the lake at once in order to avoid the boys, who would be sure to tease him.

The schoolmaster had no reason to stay, and besides he wanted to speak to Mark. So he walked hastily across the lake and overtook the boy before he had gone half a mile.

"You're not good enough, Mark," said Howard Robson. "Not good enough to win. You can't do any better than you did today, for I saw you were working your very hardest."

"I admit I shall never beat Frank Fay while he skates like he did in the last race."

"Yet he must be beaten."

"You thought you had managed to fix it, Mr. Robson, but you are not quite so smart as you think. They found skates to fit them in place of the ones that were taken away."

"I'll find some way to beat them."

"What is your new scheme for beating the Twins?" asked Mark Deane.

"I have no scheme yet. Besides, no other race has been decided upon. Perhaps there won't be any more. Hark! what noise is that?"

Mark bit his lip savagely.

"Why, what should it be," he answered, angrily. "but the

boys cheering the Timberdale Twins! Very agreeable music to listen to, Mr. Robson. Don't you think so?

"Can you stay and have supper with me, Mark, to-night? I should like you to do so."

"Yes, I can, but I warn you, I shall not be a very pleasant companion."

"I must put up with that. I don't feel in the best of temper myself."

Just as Mark and the schoolmaster had entered the parlor they heard loud shouts in the road, and looking out, they saw that quite a parade was taking place.

Frank Fay and Fred Fay were seated in a buggy, returning in triumph to Timberdale amid the shouts of their companions.

CHAPTER IX.

MARK AND THE SCHOOLMASTER DISCUSS MATTERS—THE TWINS' RACE AGAINST GREAT SKATERS.

"I hadn't much appetite before; that's settled it," said Mark, sullenly.

He sat staring into the fire without speaking, Mr. Robson drinking his coffee in silence.

"I have it!" cried Mark, suddenly springing up.

"Have what?"

"Why, I think I know how these Twins can be beaten."

"Tell me. I'm anxious to know."

"One thing is certain. We have nobody in the town who can beat them."

"It is just possible I might," said the schoolmaster, "for I'm a better skater than you, Mark."

"Yes, but you're afraid to run the risk of being beaten. I don't blame you, either, because it would be bad for a man in your position to have to play second fiddle to the Twins. Now, as we have no one in Timberdale to beat them, we must get somebody. You lived in Canada a great many years, Mr. Robson, and surely you must know some first-class skaters."

"I know two or three."

"Are they good?"

"Very."

"I mean could they beat the Fays?"

"Pshaw!" laughed Mr. Robson, scornfully. "They're in a different class, Mark. If you should ever have the good fortune to see these men you would know what skating really is."

"Then there's no difficulty."

"But there is, and a great one, too. These famous skaters won't come to Timberdale unless we make it worth their while to do so. It is all very well for you boys to race for a medal or a pair of skates. That sort of prize wouldn't attract a champion skater. He will want money, and where is that to come from?"

"I think a certain sum might be raised in Timberdale and the neighborhood. The people here are foolish enough to believe the Fays can carry all before them, and I feel sure, if they're appealed to now, whilst they are excited, they will be inclined to open their pockets."

"If they give the money, I can find the men. I think I will walk round and have a chat with Farmer Fay. He's sure to have some friends there, and it will be a good chance to sound them on the subject."

Mark agreed that this would be a good plan, and he left the schoolmaster at Farmer Fay's door.

"Glad to see you, schoolmaster," cried the farmer, greeting Mr. Robson heartily.

As Mr. Robson had anticipated there were several visitors, and as they were already talking about the skating races, there was no difficulty in leading up to the point which had taken Howard Robson to the house.

"He's a wonder, Frank is," cried Mr. Fay, excitedly, "and so's Fred."

"You ought to be proud of those lads," said one of the visitors.

"And so I am. Guess there's no one can beat them when it's a question of skating."

"That's saying a good deal, Mr. Fay," said the schoolmaster. "I admire the wonderful powers displayed by your boys as much as anybody can, but at the same time I don't think we're in a position to judge."

"Why not?"

"Because up to now they have only raced against boys from the village."

"They beat Mark Deane, and he's a fine skater."

"Oh, yes; but I can beat Mark."

"You!"

"Certainly, and I have done so. I was up at the lake with him one evening last week, and I had no trouble in beating him. So you see, Mr. Fay, you can't be sure your boys are wonders just because they are better than Mark."

"But how can I find out?"

"It seems to me there's a very easy way, Mr. Fay, only it will cost money."

"A few dollars won't stop me!" cried the farmer. "Tell me how it can be done?"

"We might have a skating carnival and offer some good money prizes. If we do that, we shall tempt some of the good skaters from Canada and the West to come to Timberdale."

"How much money will it cost?"

"I think there should be two races, one about a mile and the other a long-distance race, say ten miles. That means two first prizes, one hundred and fifty dollars for the mile race, and two hundred and fifty for the ten miles. That's four hundred dollars altogether."

"Four hundred dollars!" cried Mr. Fay with a laugh. "A flea bite! Why, I'll put up that much money myself."

"No, no," said one of his friends, hastily. "We must all stand in. You collect the subscriptions, schoolmaster, and arrange everything."

"I will be pleased to do so," answered Mr. Robson, rising.

Mr. Robson chuckled to himself all the way home. He was delighted with what had happened.

"What fools men can be," he said, "when their sons are in question. They seem to lose their heads. Why, those Fay boys have no chance whatever against Elliott and Dalton. I'll write to them to-night."

In due time answers came from both men to say they would be at Timberdale to take part in the races.

Mr. Robson found no difficulty in raising the necessary money, and only fine weather was needed to ensure success.

The boys talked of nothing else for a week.

The names of Bob Dalton and Bill Elliott were on everybody's lips.

"I believe the Twins can beat them," said Ida Lester, remaining firm in her faith in her friends.

"I don't think Frank or Fred will win," said Joe Reed. "but it's not going to be the walkover you fellows seem to imagine. I've seen lots of good skaters, and let me tell you there are not many better than the Twins."

"Perhaps they won't enter."

"What! the Twins show the white feather?" exclaimed Joe Reed, indignantly. "You don't know much about them, Harry, if you think that. I know they mean to race, for they told me so."

"They're up at the lake every day," said Ida, "getting as much practice as they can."

Mark Deane came up the road just then, and took part in the talk.

"So it's really true, is it, that the Twins are going to race?"

"Yes, Mark. Fred has entered for the mile race and Frank for the ten miles."

Mark laughed loudly.

"Bob Dalton and Bill Elliott would like to have a chance like this every day. It's not often they can pick up dollars in this fashion."

"I hope they won't have to walk back home," said Ida, "because it's cold work this weather."

There was an immense attendance at Heron Lake the day of the races. It was fortunate that there was little work to be done on the farms, for it is certain it would have been neglected.

Every man who had a rig brought it out that day and drove to Heron Lake.

"There he is! there he is!" cried one group of boys.

"That's Bob Dalton, the mile champion, Ida," said Joe Reed. The crowd gave him a cheer.

But it was nothing to the shout which greeted Fred Fay when he made his appearance. No one expected him to win, but all were delighted with his pluck in standing up against such a famous skater.

Very little time was wasted, and Mr. Robson sent the two away by a very fair start.

Almost instantly there was a shout.

"What about Fred's chances now, Ida?" asked Mark Deane.

"Look! Bob Dalton's running away from him."

CHAPTER X.

TWO GREAT RACES—A TRIUMPH FOR TIMBERDALE.

"Get a move on you, Fred!" shouted Joe Reed.

Mark Deane laughed.

"Don't you see he is moving?" he said sneeringly. "Only he's moving further behind all the time."

"Don't you want Fred to win," answered Mark, who was annoyed at Mark's words. "Surely you would rather see the championship go to a Timberdale boy than to a stranger."

"I want to see the best man win," answered Mark, who was able by this reply to avoid committing himself. "Don't you agree with me, Mr. Fay?"

Mark appealed to the father of the Twins, who was near by looking on at the race with a most woeful aspect.

"Sure, sure," answered the farmer.

"And you will," muttered Mark, as he skated away. "Ha, ha! the bubble will burst to-day. To-morrow the Timberdale Twins will be numbered with the 'has beens.'"

Bob Dalton was a long way ahead of Fred Fay still, but here a change took place. The distance between the two gradually lessened, and before another quarter of a mile was run not more than fifty yards separated them.

The spectators began to be interested again.

When they had seen Bob Dalton run away from Fred Fay they had looked upon the race as being merely a walk-over for the Canadian.

Now all was different.

The Timberdale people grew enthusiastic, and encouraged Fred with their shouts.

Mark was not frightened. He had not changed his opinion as to the result of the race.

"What do you think of it?" he asked of the schoolmaster when the two were near each other.

"Why, that Bob Dalton has the race in his hands. He can win just as he pleases."

Mark, with a joyful face, skated across the lake to where Ida Lester, Annie Reed, some other girls and a number of boys were standing.

"Deane!" cried Joe Reed.

"Well?"

"Fred Fay's moving differently now, isn't he?"

"Can't see that he is."

"But he's winning."

Mark grinned.

"What makes you say that?" he asked.

"Say it! Why, a blind man could see that Fred's catching up at every strokee."

"Then I must be worse than blind, for I don't see it."

"What do you see, if I may venture to put a question to your majesty?" said Joe Reed mockingly. He was angry at Mark, and did not care if he showed it.

"I see, Joe Reed, that Bob Dalton is simply playing with Fred."

"Playing with him?"

"Yes. Bob can win without a doubt, only he doesn't want to win by too much. He doesn't care to make a show of Fred, as he's only a boy. It's like this, Reed, Fred is not going any faster than he was when the race was started."

"Well, I say he is," answered Joe Reed, angrily, "and when the race is over we'll see who's right."

Fred was now not more than twenty yards behind Bob Dalton, and there was only about a third of a mile to be run.

The champion was falling back gradually, and when the two were about two hundred yards from the winning post, Fred was at Bob Dalton's elbow.

The excitement was tremendous now.

Quiet, sober people were shouting themselves hoarse.

Most of them had known Fred Fay ever since he was born, and naturally they wanted him to win, for his own sake, and for the honor of Timberdale.

Bob Dalton had a few friends at the lake. His reputation as a skater was great, and it had drawn some people to the spot to see him race.

"Go it, Bob!" shouted one. "You have him safe."

"Don't let him get too close," cried another. "You'd better not take chances."

"How's he to help him getting too close," exclaimed Joe Reed, as Fred swept by Bob.

The latter made a tremendous effort now. Bending forward, he dashed on at a terrific pace, drawing up to Fred at once. But try how he would he could not pass him.

"One hundred yards now!" cried Harry Pierce. "Keep it up, Fred."

"Fred wins," said Frank Fay, calmly.

It was the first word he had spoken since the race commenced, and the way in which he said it gave confidence to all his friends.

"You think so?" cried his father.

"I'm sure of it."

"Hurrah!" shouted Joe Reed. "Where's Mark Deane? Ah! there he is. I must go and say a few words to him. Deane, Deane," he cried, skating up to him.

"Well?"

"You have your wish. The best man wins. Take off your cap, Mark, and give a cheer for Fred Fay."

Joe tossed his cap in the air, shouting as he did so, but his cry, loud as it was, became lost in the great volume of sound that rose as Fred Fay passed the post a winner.

It was a close race, for the Timberdale lead was not two yards ahead of the Canadian.

Almost before the talk over this race had died away a bell was rung to let everybody know that the ten-mile race was about to be started.

Bill Elliott, the ten-mile champion, was already at the post.

The schoolmaster and he were talking quietly, taking the opportunity to do so whilst there was no one by to listen to what was said.

"That lad's a wonder," said Bill. "If his brother's only as good, I'm beaten already."

"You will be beaten," answered Howard Robson, angrily, "if you go into a race with such ideas in your head."

"You can't alter facts, mister. I'll do my best, and no man can do more. If I'm beaten it will be because he's better than me."

"Look here!" cried the schoolmaster, excitedly, "I'm not a rich man, as you know, Elliott, but if you beat this youngster I add fifty dollars out of my own pocket to the prize."

"That's talking," answered the Canadian. "I'll make this the race of my life."

Frank Fay was at the post now, and in a moment Mr. Robson had started the pair.

"Why, 'Fatty,'" cried Joe Reed, turning to Bob Fuller. "What are you doing here?"

Everybody laughed, for "Fatty" Fuller was about as fast on skates as a snail.

It is not necessary to describe such a long race as this in detail. It is sufficient to say that Bill Elliott kept a slight lead until about nine miles had been run. The pace was not a hot one, for Bill thought it wise to take things as easily as possible.

Half a mile from home, as Frank was still leading, he fell heavily on the ice. His friends were dismayed, and Bill Elliott passed him like a flash. But Frank was on his feet again in an instant, and began to skate in wonderful fashion. He caught Bill Elliott fifty yards from the winning post, and ran in a winner by six yards.

It was a great day for Timberdale.

Farmer Fay was beside himself with delight. He entertained all his friends, and the Twins had a merry party of young people who amused themselves until a late hour.

There were two notable absentees.

CHAPTER XI.

MARK DEANE AND HIS FRIENDS—A RECONCILIATION.

There were two good reasons why Mark Deane and Howard Robson were not present at the merrymaking which took place to celebrate the victory of the Twins.

First, to have been there would have been the reverse of pleasant, and secondly, the schoolmaster was entertaining the two Canadian skaters at his house.

Howard Robson was in a bitter temper, and he continually taunted his guests with their bad performances.

"Beaten by two boys!" he exclaimed.

"By two wonders," growled Bob Dalton.

"Why, what will they say in Montreal?" asked the schoolmaster. "You'll be back numbers there, I'm thinking."

"You'll rile me in a minute, Mr. Robson," put in Bill Elliott, sharply. "Could I have done any better than I did? There were three hundred dollars waiting for me if I won, and, by gosh! I wanted them bad enough."

"If you did your best, Bill," said Howard Robson, changing his tone somewhat, "you must be a very different man to what you used to be."

"How?"

"You must have gone to pieces."

"I'm skating better now than I ever was in my life, schoolmaster. You're all wrong. There's nothing the matter with me. Frank Fay was too good for me. That's all there is to it."

"And you mean to sit down quietly and not have another try?"

"The result would be the same."

"And what do you say, Bob?"

"Why, that I'm ready to race against Fred Fay whenever I get the chance, and I'll beat him, too."

"Bravo! That's something like talking."

"I took the thing too easy," continued Bob. "Of course I shall know what I'm up against next time, and all Fred Fay

will see of me will be my heels. See here, Bill, I believe you can do better than you did to-day. I'm dead sure I've seen you skate faster."

"Faster? Oh, yes, I can do that. The race was a slow one. It wasn't the pace. It was the terrific spurt that youngster put on. I defy anybody to stand up against it."

"That may be. Shall I tell you how to win the next race?"

"Thunder. I should like to know."

"Where's Pete Carson?"

"In Montreal. What about him, Bob?"

"Let him enter for the ten-mile race."

"It's no use. He's not so good as me."

"That makes no difference. He isn't wanted to win it, Bill. He can last seven or eight miles anyway, so let him go like lightning that distance. He'll act as pacemaker for you. By that time Frank Fay will be pumped out, you'll be keeping yourself, and will fly by an easy winner."

Bill's face brightened. The schoolmaster lost the black look he had worn for the last few hours.

"By jingo! Bob, I believe you've struck it this time."

"Doesn't it strike you that Frank Fay will know what Pete Carson is in the race for? I'm dead sure he will, and whatever Pete does won't have any effect on Frank Fay. He will let Pete force the pace just as much as he pleases. He won't try to catch him. He'll stick to Bill Elliott like a leech, and when the proper time comes he'll make his spurt."

"Mark is right," said the schoolmaster slowly. "That is exactly what will happen."

"Not if we work the thing right," exclaimed Bob Dalton. "We can easily make Frank Fay believe that Pete is better than Bill, so that he'll be more afraid of Pete. Leave that to me. I'll work it."

"You are sure you can?" asked the schoolmaster, doubtfully.

"Sure, mister? I wish I was as sure of getting a few hundred dollars."

"Now when can these races take place? I don't see how we can have another at Timberdale just yet, for the people here won't put up their money again so soon."

"Just across the border in Canada they're going to have some races," said Bill Elliott, "in about a week."

"Is there a ten-mile race?"

"No."

"Then what's to be done?"

"Let them know that Frank Fay is willing to race there, and those in charge will quickly offer a prize. They'll know what a drawing card Frank Fay will be after beating me to-day. Make your mind easy, schoolmaster, the race can be arranged. The only thing to do is to get Frank Fay to enter."

"Leave that to me," said Mark Deane. "I can work it."

"You! Better keep your hands off, Mark," exclaimed Howard Robson. "The Fays will suspect crooked business directly you interfere."

"Thanks. You have a fine opinion of me. The Fays won't suspect me in future, for I swear to be their bosom friend, and I intend to have nothing more to do with you. When we next meet, Mr. Robson, we'll be acquaintances, that is all."

"A dangerous game."

"I can play it all right, sir."

"By gosh! I believe he can," cried Bob Dalton. "He looks as if he could."

Somehow Mark did not take this as a very high compliment, and the color mounted to his cheeks when he heard what the Canadian had to say about him.

The party separated, the two strangers remaining at Mr. Robson's house, accepting the hospitality which he had offered them, and Mark went home.

The fun was still at its height as he passed the Fay home-

stead, and this thought of how Frank and his friends were enjoying themselves sent him to bed in no pleasant humor.

The next day he commenced operations, going boldly up to Frank Fay. Mark had watched Frank go into the wood with his gun, and he had taken a short cut and had contrived to meet him.

Frank was somewhat more bitter against Mark than he had been previously, for Ida and Joe Reed had told him the comments made by Mark whilst the races were being run.

He put his rifle on the ground at once, expecting to have to defend himself.

"Well, what is it—a fight!"

Mark laughed loudly.

"Why, Frank, old chap, what on earth has got into your head now?"

"So I'm old chap, am I now?" said Frank. "You're mighty friendly all at once."

"I mean to be your friend in future if you will let me. I don't see any reason why we should quarrel, and I'm very sorry I had words with you. You're a great skater, Frank, and I feel quite proud that a Timberdale boy should have done such wonderful things."

Frank was quite deceived. He was no fool, but he had a manly, generous nature, and therefore, he always thought as well as he could of other people. Thus Mark had quite an easy task.

"I'm sure I'm delighted to hear you talk like that, Mark. and here's my hand on it."

The two boys shook each other's hands heartily, and just as they were doing so, Ida and Fred came up. What they saw fairly astounded them.

"You seem surprised, Ida?"

"I should think so, Mark. Wonders will never cease."

"Well, Ida, Frank and I have made up our quarrel, and we mean to be like brothers in future. Won't you shake hands, too, Fred?"

Fred Fay looked doubtfully at Frank, evidently wanting his brother to confirm what Mark had said.

"It's all right, Fred," was Frank's reply to Fred's look of inquiry. "In future the boys and girls of Timberdale will be one happy family."

"Hurrah!" cried Ida, clapping her hands. "I never felt so glad in all my life."

CHAPTER XII.

MARK DEANE'S HEROISM—AT THE RACES AT MAXWELL.

The four young people went off gunning, and to show the strength of the new friendship, Frank lent Mark his rifle when the first gray squirrel was seen.

The sport was not very good, and they began to talk about the previous day's races.

"Have you seen anything of the two Canadians?" asked Fred.

"Yes, I had supper with them at Mr. Robson's house last night. That's how it was I was not with you, Fred."

"And what do they say?"

"Why, Bob Dalton feels sure he can beat you, and would like another try as soon as possible."

"He can be accommodated," laughed Fred.

"I told him so. Now, Bill Elliott takes a different view of his defeat."

"What does he think?"

"Why, Frank, he believes you are too good for him."

"So Frank is."

"I know it, Ida, and I told Bill so. Now, naturally, Bill doesn't like to sit down under such a thrashing as he got."

"But if he says I'm too good, what's the object of his racing with me again?"

"He's not anxious to do that, Frank, but he has a notion that he'd like to make a bit of money, and you can't blame him for that."

"How does he propose to do it?"

"Next week there is to be a skating carnival at Maxwell, in Canada. The committee will fix a ten-mile race if you say you'll enter, Frank."

"Why, of course I will. I'm not afraid of the Canucks. So Bill will race against me."

"Not quite that. He has a friend, Pete Carson, a far better skater than he is himself, and Bill says he is sure that Pete can beat you, for he's a perfect wonder."

"I'm not afraid of him."

"Why should you be, only if he's much better than Bill, you will have to work very hard to win."

"But how does Bill make money if Pete Carson wins?" inquired Fred Fay.

"By betting on him. Then Bill intends to be in the race himself because there is a second prize, and if anything happens to you or Pete, he will get it."

"Well, you tell your friend Bill——"

"He's not my friend," cried Mark, hastily. "I don't have people like that for friends."

"Well, tell him, anyway, that I shall be in the race. I will write to the committee at Maxwell to-night, saying I will enter a ten-mile race if they will arrange one, so he can advise his friend, Pete Carson, to be ready."

"We'll all go over," cried Mark. "If you win it will be a great day for Timberdale."

Farmer Fay quite approved of Frank's decision.

"Win or lose, my lad," he said, "don't let anyone scare you, an' by gosh! I think you won't lose. Bill Elliott did his best before."

"But I'm told I have a better man than he to go against next time, pop. He's called Pete Carson."

"Never heard of him."

Farmer Fay thought this quite conclusive. If he had never heard of him it must be because he did not amount to much. The farmer had been keenly interested in skating for about two weeks, and he therefore thought he knew all about it. Frank, however, was not convinced by his father's words, though he felt that it was strange he had never heard of Pete Carson before. Mark Deane mentioned the name to him.

The Twins talked much about this mysterious individual, and it may be imagined that they read very attentively a paragraph which appeared in the newspaper about three days later.

It was under the heading "Maxwell," and was as follows:

"The skating committee announce that Frank Fay, the winner of the great ten-mile race on Heron Lake, has expressed his willingness to go the same distance at Maxwell, if such a race should be fixed. Seeing the great interest that would be taken in such an event, the committee have determined to offer a prize of five hundred dollars for a ten-mile race, open to all. Bill Elliott, who was beaten at Heron Lake, will race again, and Pete Carson, a better man than Bill, will be in the race, too. Frank Fay will have to hustle if he wants to beat Pete."

"By jingo! this Pete must be a bit of a wonder," exclaimed Frank.

"If he is, you will beat him, Frank. I'm only afraid of one thing."

"What is that?"

"Why, I don't trust Mark Deane. I can't believe in such sudden friendship, after the bitter way in which he has spoken against us. Depend upon it, he's concocting some crooked business. You have more to fear from Mark Deane than you have from Pete Carson."

"I think you are misjudging Mark," said Frank.

"Time will show."

Mark was quite aware that Fred suspected him, and as he wanted to remove all doubts on the part of both the Twins he resolved to take certain steps without delay.

"I know how to fix Fred," he said. "He'll trust me more than Frank does when I'm through."

Mark managed to have a talk with the schoolmaster without being seen to do so by any person in the town, and in a few moments a little scheme was arranged which seemed quite satisfactory.

The plan was put into operation without delay.

Frank and Mark were walking up a path in the woods, and this path had high rocks on each side, the bluff rising quite precipitously.

Frank was walking in front of Mark.

The latter looked about him very keenly, as if he was searching for something, and as he did so he glanced upward more than once.

Suddenly he coughed in a peculiar manner, and almost at the very instant that he did so, a great rock came tumbling over the bluff, as if it had been violently loosened from its resting place.

Mark jumped forward as quick as lightning, and gave Frank a push which almost sent him off his feet. Frank bounded forward several yards, just managing to keep on his feet as he did so.

Mark himself sprang underneath an overhanging ledge of rock, crouching down close.

There was a tremendous crash, as the great rock that had fallen from the bluff reached the path.

Frank had turned around in time to see what had happened.

"Mark Deane, I shall never forget what you did for me. I was turning round to abuse you for having pretty well sent me off my feet, without thinking that your doing so had saved my life."

"What else could I do? I saw the rock coming, and didn't want you to be smashed."

"Anyway, you risked your life, and it was a very brave action."

Mark looked down to hide a smile which he could not keep from appearing. It is hardly necessary to say that he had never been in any risk at all.

The whole thing had been arranged between Mark and the schoolmaster, and Frank had been brought to the spot to be victimized. The cough Mark gave was the signal to the schoolmaster, who hurled the rock off the bluff instantly, and Mark knew beforehand that he would shelter himself under the projecting ledge. After this Mark was a hero.

Fred Fay was warmer in his praise than anybody, and Ida showed such friendship for him that she very nearly made the Twins jealous.

"Mark must go with us to Maxwell," said Farmer Fay. "He's a fine lad."

So Mark made one of the merry party that went with Frank and Fred from Timberdale to Maxwell on the day of the races.

As soon as the Twins arrived at the sheet of water where the carnival was to take place the Twins had Pete Carson pointed out to them. Naturally enough they were very much interested in his work, and they saw at once that he was a flyer.

There was a great crowd present, standing around the frozen pool on the banks, discussing the probable results of the race, and making bets with each other on the different events.

"So that's Frank Fay, is it?" said one man, as the boy, who was taking a little practice, went past. "Well, I've seen all the champion skaters of the last twenty years, and I tell you Pete will win!"

CHAPTER XIII.

SKATING AT MAXWELL—THE GREAT TEN-MILE RACE.

"So I have no chance against Pete Carson," said Frank Fay, speaking to himself. "He thinks so, anyway, and as he says he's watched all the champions for twenty years, he ought to be a good judge."

Strange to say, Frank laughed quietly as he looked at the stranger who had made this remark about Pete Carson. It did not seem to alarm him in the least degree.

He skated over to Fred and told him what he had heard, and both boys laughed.

Mark Deane when he came up eyed them keenly. He was wondering what it was that had put them in such good spirits, and was surprised when they told him they were laughing because some expert had said Frank had no chance against Pete Carson.

Before the race started Mark contrived to slip away and mingle with the crowd, leaving the Twins with Joe Reed, Ida Lester and Mr. Fay.

Mark sought out Howard Robson. The schoolmaster had come over to see the sport, and Mark knew where to find him.

In the great crowd that had collected around the ice it was easy for the two to talk without being noticed by anyone they knew.

"Have you done any good, Mark?"

"I've given valuable advice, Mr. Robson."

"To Frank Fay?"

"Yes."

"And will it be followed?"

"I think so. In fact, I have no doubt of it. Since I've saved Frank's life—ha! ha! I stand first. Whatever I say goes. Joe Reed gave advice the exactly opposite to mine, but Joe wasn't listened to. He has to take a back seat now."

"And what was this advice?"

"Why, I told Frank that he must not let Pete Carson get far ahead of him. That danger would come from Pete, not from Bill Elliott."

"If he does that," laughed the schoolmaster, "there's not much doubt what will happen."

"I see his finish."

"Do you know what all the people round the lake are saying to-day, Mark?"

"Tell me, sir."

"Why, that Frank Fay has no chance. That means a good deal, for all the best judges of skating in Canada are here to-day, besides many from Minneapolis and other places in the West. There are some first-rate New York skaters here, too."

"How do they know?"

"Because both Frank and Pete have been taking spins on the ice, and it is easy for a judge to recognize them up when he sees them together."

"And yet the Twins were laughing ready to die when I left them just now. Why were they doing that?"

"Possibly because they know they won't have anything to

laugh at after the race," answered the schoolmaster savagely. "How I hate them," hissed Howard Robson through his clenched teeth.

"Well, there's no need to say that. Your look shows it. But what is the reason why you detest them so?"

"What is yours?"

"Oh! mine?" said Mark. "Why, that's easy to see. I don't care to be second fiddle to anyone. I'd like to see them taken down a peg or two. But that can't be your reason."

"No. I'm not jealous of them. I can't say any more now, Mark. But see, they're off already. I thought the race wasn't to be started yet."

"Pete's carrying out instructions. He's going right ahead."

"You need have no fear of Pete. He stands in with Bill Elliott for half the purse if Bill wins, so Pete will obey orders. I'm more curious to see what Frank Fay intends doing. We shall know in a few minutes if he means to follow the advice you gave him."

Bill Elliott was a long way in the rear of Frank at this point, and Frank himself, was one hundred yards behind Pete Carson.

Pete was going like a cyclone, fairly flying along. Frank began now to close up to him, but he did not display that same style which had seemed so graceful at Heron Lake.

The people compared Pete Carson and Frank, much to the disadvantage of the latter, and Joe Reed, one of Frank's most faithful friends, could not but admit that they were right.

"Is Frank skating as well as usual to-day?" asked Joe. "What do you say, Ida?"

"I don't think he is."

"I can't see any difference in him," said Fred.

"Then I will tell you what is the matter," answered Joe. "Frank is skating just as well as ever, and Pete Carson skates so well that he makes Frank look like an amateur."

"No doubt you are right, Joe," said Fred, turning away so as to hide a laugh.

At all these great skating races a certain gambling element is present. It cannot be kept away. The men who belonged to it were speculating largely on the result, and heavy odds were offered on Pete Carson.

The schoolmaster and Mark Deane were delighted.

How many miles have they gone now?"

"Four."

"And Frank is nearly up to Carson. Good. That shows your advice is being followed, Mark. Great Scott! What a pace Carson is setting?"

Pete was going along as if it was a hundred-yards dash instead of a ten-mile race. It was simply wonderful that he had been able to maintain such a rate from the start, and, strange to say, he showed no sign of slowing down.

Bill Elliott was further behind than ever. Frank and Pete were level now, and the crowd cheered frantically as the two leaders dashed by. Such going had never been seen before.

"By gosh!" said one man, "it's a case of who has the best pair of bellows. The youngster is as good a goer as the veteran."

This was the man who, previous to the race, had pronounced Frank's chances hopeless.

Some of the crowd began to shout to Bill Elliott to catch up to the others, because they did not know that Bill was playing a waiting game purposely.

Five miles and still the same terrific race, and six miles were run, and Pete Carson was moving like a steam engine. He showed not the least signs of giving way.

"Pete may actually win," said Mark Deane.

"What of it?" asked the schoolmaster.

"Bill Elliott won't like it."

"We don't care. We only want to see Frank Fay beaten. That's all we are here for."

Timberdale was rooting its hardest for Frank. The people who had come over, with the exception of Mark and the schoolmaster, were all collected in one spot, and they cheered Frank frantically every time he passed.

Ida and the other girls waved their handkerchiefs, and several times Frank turned towards his friends in order to show himself grateful to them for the encouragement they were giving him.

"Great race this, Pete Carson, isn't it?" said Frank to his rival, as they were traveling the eighth mile.

Pete made no answer. He was either too tired to speak or else he was saving his breath.

At this point Bill Elliott began to make an effort.

Bill was an old favorite with the crowd, many of whom would have been glad if he could have avenged himself for the defeat he suffered at Timberdale, so a volley of cheers greeted Bill as he tore round the track, gaining at every stride. Bill had been saving himself for this, and Mark and Howard Robson were encouraged to think that his tactics would prove successful.

Frank looked round now.

"Why, this won't do, Pete," he cried. "Here's Bill Elliott catching up to us fast. We've been taking it too easy. Let's get a gait on us."

"That boy's game," cried one of the crowd. "Hear him bluffing now."

Frank laughed loudly as he heard this comment, and then leaving Pete as if he was standing still, the Timberdale lad dashed ahead. Peter made a gallant effort, but he was done with. He staggered rather than fell over on the ice, and had to be picked up and carried away.

Frank never slackened until the winning post was reached, and when he passed it, Bill Elliot was so far behind that he was lost in the crowd which had now overrun the lake.

CHAPTER XXV.

PLOTTING AGAINST THE TWINS—AT THE ICE CARNIVAL.

It is needless to say that Frank had a great reception after the race was over.

Everybody came around him and congratulated him on his success.

"I'd better go and do the same," said Mark Deane.

"You!" cried Howard Robson.

"Certainly. I'm supposed to be his friend now, and I must act my part," answered Mark, bitterly.

"Well, I don't envy you, Mark. I couldn't act the hypocrite to that extent."

"Then it's a good thing I can," laughed Mark. "One of us must do it."

Mark hurried over and greeted Frank warmly.

"Timberdale will be prouder than ever of you now," he said.

"I am glad my father was here to see me win," Frank remarked, and the old farmer who was standing some way back amongst the crowd, heard Frank's words, and was prouder than ever of his son.

There were more races, but as in none of these had anyone from Timberdale entered, they possessed little interest for Frank and his friends. Fred Fay was not racing to-day, for some reason.

The business of the day was not yet over, for at night there was to be a grand carnival on the ice. Farmer Fay and all

(Continued on page 20)

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BRIEF, BUT POINTED.

Millions of butterflies are eaten every year by the Australian aborigines. The insects congregate in vast quantities on the rocks of the Bugong mountains and the natives secure them by kindling fires of damp wood and thus suffocating them. They are often gathered in baskets, baked, sifted to remove the wings, and finally pressed into cakes.

Near Scarborough, England, a farm exists for rearing moths and butterflies. Half an acre of land has been planted with trees and shrubs for the purpose. In their season the stock of caterpillars is twenty thousand. From thirty to forty thousand preserved insects are kept in reserve, so that butterflies and moths can be supplied irrespective of the time of year.

Many intelligent persons are deterred from swallowing the seeds of berries, grapes and other fruits lest the lodgment of these small bits of indigestibleness may induce that dreadful accident, appendicitis. This fear is utterly baseless, since the healthy appendix is protected by a valvular arrangement which prevents even the smallest seeds from entering it. It is only after inflammation has already destroyed its normal protection that any foreign substance can gain access to it. To feel compelled to eschew all seedy berries and fruits is to seriously curtail one's dietary, and is absolutely unnecessary. In fact, the free and constant use of ripe berries and fruits of all kinds is one of the best preventatives of this dangerous disease.

Paris has been the home of "blackguard arts and industries" ever since the days of Villon, and now, according to the Figaro, the subtle art of blackmail has been carried to a higher stage of refinement by the use of the carrier-pigeon. Thus the inventor, "It is very simple; when you have got hold of some one by the threat of sensational revelations, of awkward documents, or, more simply, when you have stolen some deeds which you are ready to restore for a consideration, you are always pretty sure to get caught in going to the poste-restante to get the reply with the cash. With my plan there are simply no risks. You send the bird in a basket to your client with a little note to this effect: 'If within twenty-four hours you do not set the pigeon at liberty after having fastened under its wing ten one thousand franc notes, you will catch it.'" This is pleasantly called le vol au vol. "Oh, that I had wings of a dove," will no longer be regarded as the sign of innocence.

In Russia a child ten years of age cannot go away from home to school without a passport. Nor can common servants and peasants go away from where they live without one. A gentleman residing in Moscow or St. Petersburg cannot receive the visit of a friend who remains many hours without notifying the police. The porters of all houses are compelled to make returns of the arrival and departure of strangers, and for every one of the above passports a charge of some kind is made.

OUR COMIC COLUMN.

Tommy—Pa, what is a limited monarchy? Pa—Anything less than four kings.

"Don't you know that this is not a smoking compartment?" "Never fear. I'll hide my pipe when I see the conductor coming."

"How would you like to have your steak, sir?" asked the waiter who had taken the order nearly half an hour before. "Very much, indeed," quietly replied the patient patron.

"Why do you always put a pitcher of water and a glass on the table before an orator?" "That," said the chairman of many reception committees, "is to give him something to do in case he forgets his piece and has to stop and think."

The Apollo Belvedere had just been completed. "Yes," proudly boasted Calamis, "several department stores have wanted him for a floor-walker." Thus, indeed, the sculptor realized he had produced the perfect type of manly beauty.

Wild-eyed Man—I want a lot of poison, right off. Drug Clerk—It's against the law to sell poison to people who look as if they want to commit suicide; but I'll let you have a bottle of Doctor Black-Sequin's Elixir of Life. That seems to be pretty sure death.

"Somebody ought to talk to Youngfellow. He'll never get on in politics if he keeps on antagonizing the powers that be." "But he doesn't. He is very careful to do all that is required of him." "That's all very well, but it won't help him while his wife persists in copying the boss's wife's new dresses."

A Decoy.—The attention of a hansom driver was called to a purse lying on the mat of his cab as he "crawled" along the street. He winked and said: "Well, sir, when trade's bad I put it there—it's empty—and you'd be surprised what a lot of people take short drives in my cab. I've had four fares within the last hour."

The traveler with dark eyeglasses sidled over to the man with the tourist cap. "Excuse the curiosity," he said, "but I'd like to know what that label was that you gummed on your trunk just now." "That's all right," said the man with the cap. "Here's another just like it. I had a lot printed before I left home. Read it." The man with the glasses took the slip of paper and read it aloud. "While a trunk we being carelessly handled at the union station last Friday it exploded with great violence, tearing loose the baggage-man's scalp and demolishing one end of the station." The other man put his hand in his side pocket. "Have a few?" he asked. "Sure," said the man with the glasses.

DECOYED TO AN ASYLUM

By Paul Braddon

"This does not look like a hospital, doctor," said I to Dr. Donald, as leaning on his arm we walked the rounds to take a view of what I supposed to be my temporary home.

"Yes, it is," he replied, "a hospital for the insane; in other words, an asylum."

"An asylum! Great Heavens, doctor, you don't mean to say that you are going to put me among the lunatics?"

"Just so," he very coolly added; "you're in an asylum on Ward's Island."

"I'm going to get out of here, then," and the doctor grimly smiled at me, conscious that I was in his power.

"You'll never leave here till you leave in a box," he added.

A sudden revelation burst into my mind, and already excited, I attempted to break away from him, but calling some assistants, I was overpowered and dragged to a cell.

"This is a conspiracy—a plot to rob me of my property, doctor, and you are an accomplice in the scheme."

"This man is as mad as a March hare," he said to the four attendants; "you must not heed his ravings," and he walked away.

My excited condition, and persistent denials that I was a lunatic, only served to increase the conviction among the attendants that I was mad. They stripped me of my clothing, and put on the peculiar dress of the institution.

Knowing that any exhibition of frenzy would only injure my cause, I began to quiet down and think over the situation.

I was as sane as any man in New York. I was an old resident, and by frugal and well-trained business habits I had acquired a handsome property. I was beloved and respected by my immediate associates. My family relations were all that a happy, contented man could ask. My wife and children clung to me with a warmth and ardor of affection that could not be otherwise than sincere.

None of my ancestry had ever been afflicted with disordered brains, neither was I.

But here I was, shut up in a lunatic asylum, for what cause I could not tell.

I had often read of cases, some of quite recent date, where innocent, sane persons had been immured in an asylum, but incredulous, like the rest of the world, I would throw down my paper and say:

"Pshaw, I don't believe it. That's made out of whole cloth. There must have been a screw loose somewhere. In this age of civilization and enlightenment they wouldn't dare conspire to do any such thing. The doctors wouldn't dare make out a commitment."

But now the thing was changed. Here I was behind bolts and bars, shut in from God's pure and free sunlight, from friends and society. The very thought of it well-nigh made me crazy, if I was sane before.

"Ah, ha," thought I at last. "I think I see it all now. I have been a little too convivial of late—drank somewhat to excess, but never too much to lead me to neglect my business. That detested mother-in-law of mine is afraid that I will waste my fortune, and I'll warrant she has conspired to get me here."

For days I couldn't eat the food the attendants brought me, and I was becoming weak and exhausted.

"Say, old fellow," said one of them to me, "why don't you eat your grub?"

"That meat smells bad—it is offensive, and not fit for a dog," I replied. "Bah! take it out of here."

"There he goes again. Crazy on the subject of diseased meat. Well, he'll get cured of that," chimed in another.

One day I asked permission to have a bath, and I was led by two attendants to a sort of pool in a large room downstairs, where were gathered a hard-looking set of men, whose insanity could not be questioned, and who were afflicted with loathsome skin diseases. They were washing themselves in the same water. I was told to undress and take my bath. I replied that the water was not fit for a sound, healthy man. Upon my refusal to obey one of the men held me up to a post while the other struck me across the back and shoulders with a lash like the cat-o'-nine-tails.

Whenever one of the physicians passed my cell I demanded an examination, and if sound of mind, a discharge; but all my remonstrances and demands were met with scorn. I tried every means to communicate with my wife, but every effort failed. The weeks passed into months, and the months into years, with no ray of hope to escape the fearful imprisonment I was undergoing. The thought of self-destruction often suggested itself to me, but I battled against it. I was resolved to break my way to liberty somehow. I had a large pocket-knife when I was brought to the institution, and after many weeks of careful work I had made a tolerably good saw out of the largest blade.

With this I worked at the bars of my window—a little each day, and sometimes at night, when I thought the noise could not be heard—for the space of six months, till I had nearly cut through each one of them.

I had secreted underneath my bed two pairs of sheets.

I awaited with great anxiety a favorable opportunity to make the attempt for liberty, rather than die in duress.

It was about midnight. All was quiet. The moon was shining beautifully, and everything was favorable for my flight. I loosened the window-bars inside by a gentle blow and opened the screen, but I was yet three stories from the ground.

I connected the hidden sheets into a rope, and lowered myself with safety, scaled the eight-foot fence and quickly left Ward's Island Insane Asylum behind me, and stood a free man upon the beach at Hell Gate.

I thought I might, even at that hour, be able to signal some boat. The silvery light of the moon would aid me to detect any moving near, across the water, but I was doomed to disappointment. I could not see one. I was not safe yet, and I naturally felt anxious. Liberty to me then was as precious as life. I went back to the asylum yard, for I recollected that my eye had fallen on something I could make use of.

It was a long ladder.

I carried it to the shore, and then returned for two planks.

I took off my shirt and tore it into strips. I lashed the planks on the ladder, and launched my raft on the waters of Hell Gate.

I seized a short piece of plank for an oar.

My position was a perilous one. I took off my shoes and trousers, strung them over my shoulder, and pulled with might and main to the opposite shore at the foot of Ninety-eighth street.

As I did not wish to go to my house—for I knew that the news of my escape would bring a horde of detectives in search of me—I concluded to wait till a seasonable hour in the morning, when I would present myself at the house of a friend whom I could trust. I was obliged to button up to my neck a short coat I had on to hide my nakedness.

When I thought the family all up I rang the door-bell; a servant ushered me into the parlor, and soon I heard footsteps.

"George Danforth come back from the dead!" screamed Mrs.

Smith, the lady of the house, stepping back with sudden fright.

"Yes, Mrs. Smith, out of a living tomb."

"Your friends have given you up as dead."

"As dead?"

"Yes, as dead."

"Did they not know where I was?"

"Why, certainly not. Your wife has mourned for your loss in widows' weeds for years."

"Great Heavens! What does this mean? I have been imprisoned in the insane asylum, on Ward's Island, and just made my escape last night."

"There is a mystery about this, Mr. Danforth."

"Yes, one that I intend to probe to the bottom."

"You must be hungry. Come into the dining-room and have some breakfast."

"In the meantime, Mrs. Smith, will you send around word to Mrs. Danforth that a gentleman wishes to see her here at once."

After my experiences of the night I was able to do justice to my breakfast. I could hardly persuade myself that I was a free man were it not for the contrast between my surroundings. I had hardly finished my meal, and was sitting in a chair chatting with Mrs. Smith and members of her family, when the door-bell rang. Mrs. Smith responded to the summons, and conducted a lady, dressed in black, through the hallway into the dining-room. I arose from my chair and awaited recognition.

"My husband, George Danforth!" As she uttered the words a deathly pallor spread over her countenance. She could not move. She was transfixed.

"Yes, my dear wife, I am George Danforth, once dead, but now alive again," and I rushed to seize her in my arms, as I saw that she was about to sink into a swoon. The shock of our sudden meeting again was too much for her nerves.

She had long given me up as dead; that some sudden misfortune had met me, or that I had been murdered. For weeks my home was watched by detectives, but they did not see me "at home." I remained at the house of my friend, in concealment, but not at rest; for, though confidential friends, I was secretly at work to detect the author or authors of the infamous plot.

I was right in my surmise that my avaricious mother-in-law was at the bottom of it, acting in collusion with a brace of physicians, who gave the certificate upon which the commitment was made.

A doctor's certificate will send a sane man to a lunatic asylum. Here is the germ of crime. A brood of vipers is hatched from this egg.

I could have sent my mother-in-law and those doctors to State prison for a long term, but the scandal that the trial would make public, and the disgrace that would taint my family, led me to keep silent in that respect, but I have written this recital of my own real experiences that the world may know how innocent sane persons are lingering in filthy, vermin-covered dungeons in the United States, under apparent official sanction. It is time this crime was stamped out."

KILLING TURTLES

Turtles are a menace to fish hatcheries and do a lot of damage. They are cannibals when it comes to eating fish, and because of their murderous inclinations fish wardens and students of fisheries are a unit in favor of their extermination from hatching ponds.

At the State fish hatchery at Pratt the lake is fed from the Ninnescah River and turtles get into the ponds from that

stream. They are known to be fish killers, so means are being devised to get rid of them. There are two ways, shooting and trapping, the latter being the more efficacious.

Some time ago a lot of turtles appeared in the Pratt hatchery. Prof. L. L. Dyche, State Fish and Game Warden, decided to shoot them, and since the neighborhood had a young boy of some 12 years who was an expert shot with a rifle, Dyche found him.

"Say, son," he said, "I will furnish all of the ammunition for you if you will shoot turtles. They are sticking their heads up every morning now and the shooting ought to be good."

The youngster took up the proposition gladly, for it furnished fine sport for him. The turtles come to the surface and poked up their heads and at such times the youngster did his firing. When a turtle's head is struck or knocked off by a bullet the body drops back into the water immediately. Then, in about two days the body comes to the surface and floats.

The youngster shot about 30 times in one day. But there were no bodies visible. Two days later, however, the water was littered with them, and when they were gathered up in a boat it was found that the boy had killed eighty-seven, a rattling good record.

The most effective way that is being worked out on a large scale is a series of traps to be located at the intake of the water from the river into the ponds. The trap is a unique contrivance. Large boxes are to be built of half-inch meshed wire. On the river or lake side boards some six inches in width are to be laid on the sides of the wire boxes, making a sort of runway, slanted at an angle of perhaps forty-five degrees. Across the top of the boxes connecting the two runway planks will be two more planks made into trap doors. The planks are narrowed and weighted on one end with lead and set on an iron balance rod.

A turtle is a peculiar creature. It likes to crawl upon things, and these runways will tempt him. The turtle will get upon top and crawl along and push the first turtle a few inches further along. A third will about make enough weight to tip the trap board, and down into the wire box the game will be dumped. On the four inside walls of the wire box sheet metal of some kind will be used as lining, over which the turtles cannot crawl because they cannot get a foothold.

But the biggest and meanest turtle of them all, the old snapping turtle, is a pretty bright chap. He doesn't take to crawling upon boards or doing any aerial stunts of that kind. The traps won't work on him once in fifty times and other means have been devised by the Kansas fish and game warden to capture him. He gets into the pond and there meets his Waterloo.

An iron stake is run through a fish and the stake is then driven down into the bed of the lake near the shore. Of course the whole fish is put under water. Right under the stake is placed an old-fashioned steel trap securely anchored.

The old snapping turtle makes for the fish and enjoys his dinner, but in probably 50 per cent. of the cases while waddling around enjoying his repast he sticks one of his short, stocky legs into the trap and is caught. You would think that a snapping turtle would fight and pull loose, even though it meant the sacrifice of a leg. But he doesn't. He yields and quits. When caught your Mr. Snapper is always a quitter. He is much like a mountain lion in that respect. A lion will raise Ned until caught in a trap and then he yields like a baby.

Also your snapping turtle is very much of a sucker. Suppose he is fortunate in eating the fish on the stake and getting away without being caught in the trap. He will come right back to that stake again looking for more food, and a second bait will most often mean his finish.

(Continued from page 16)

those who had come with him went back to their hotel to have supper. Ida Lester and Annie Reed were not with them, for the two girls were staying with a friend of Ida's mother who lived in the town, but they all arranged to meet at the rink at night.

Mark and the schoolmaster were furious. Bill Elliott was mad, because this last defeat had taken place in his own town before his friends, who had hitherto thought him invincible. They had looked upon his defeat at Timberdale as an accident, and had crowded the rink expecting to see him turn the tables on Frank Fay.

Pete Carson took his beating well. Pete had never expected to win, for he was only making the running for Elliott, and therefore he was not disappointed.

"I'm ready for anything now," said Mark, as he walked towards the rink in the evening with Howard Robson.

"You want revenge?"

"Yes, I do, and I'll have it some way or other. How can it be managed?"

"Do you mean you want to arrange another race with the Fays and get some one to run against them who can win?"

"No."

"Perhaps you think that it can't be done?"

"I don't say that," answered Mark, "but it's too slow for me, Mr. Robson. I feel boiling over, and want something done to-night."

"You're talking strangely, Mark. It seems to me you're proposing a kind of plot to me, some scheme, in fact, to do the Fays serious injury."

"And what if I was?"

The schoolmaster made no answer.

"Does it shock you?" asked Mark, sneeringly. "Are you so good that you decline to enter into an arrangement of this kind? I didn't think you were so scrupulous."

"I don't say no, Mark, but I must know more about it before I consent to join you. You must go into details and tell me exactly what you mean."

"That's what I can't do. I haven't worked the thing out yet. All I know is, I will get square with those Fays, and especially Frank, before this night is over. Can't something be done during the carnival at the rink?"

"It is possible it might be, but what I can't say. An idea has just occurred to me, Mark."

"What is it?"

"We won't do the work ourselves; we'll get somebody else to do the business. It's just as well in this affair to keep in the background."

"No doubt it is," said Mark. "The trouble is to find the man who is willing to go in with us."

"We shall find him; in fact, I have a man in my mind now. Pete Carson's the fellow. He's always hard-up, and a little money will tempt him to do anything."

"Can you find him? If we're going to do anything it must be done quickly."

"I know a saloon where he's generally to be found. It's two blocks away and we shall pass it. You wait outside while I go in, Mark, and have a talk with him."

Mark left the schoolmaster some little time before the saloon was reached, and crossing the road, waited impatiently to hear the result of Mr. Robson's mission.

The scorer made his appearance sooner than Mark had expected.

The boy saw from his associate's look that things had gone badly.

"No need to ask what's happened," said Mark. "Your face shows it plain enough."

"Yes," answered Howard Robson, savagely. "I could do

nothing with him. It seems I misjudged him. Pete," he added sarcastically, "has a finer sense of honor than either you or I."

"What did he say?"

"That he'd see us at the bottom of the river before he'd lend a hand to the job. In fact he went further and swore he'd tell Frank Fay to look out for danger. 'If I can beat him on a pair of skates,' said Pete, 'by gosh! I'll do it, but I'm a dead square sport, mister, and I want you to know it!'"

"What a fool!" said Mark contemptuously. "Well, there's only one course open now. We must do the business ourselves."

With this determination the two walked on to the rink, separating before they came to the entrance, having previously arranged where they would meet.

It was a very brilliant scene that met the eye when the inclosure was passed.

The great sheet of ice was crowded by a gay throng, most of whom were in fancy dress. There were princes and pages, clowns and courtiers, costumes of every color and shape and of all nations. Hundreds, or rather thousands of lights, most of them shaded by colored glass, lit up the scene. Mark stood watching the crowd that circled round and round to the music of a band.

For some time his eyes were dazzled by the scene, and he could distinguish no one, but soon becoming accustomed to the glare, he was able to pick out faces in the crowd. Mark made a bitter speech.

He saw passing him Frank Fay and Ida Lester skating hand in hand. Annie Reed with Fred Fay were a few yards behind.

"I suppose," he muttered, "if I asked her to skate with me she'd decline. She wants to be seen with the hero of the hour. That's a girl all over. Anyway, I'll risk her. There's no harm in trying."

Mark stationed himself near the edge of the rink, so that when his friends, as he called them, came around again, they could scarcely help seeing him.

Frank was the first to do so.

"Hello!" he cried, "there's Mark Deane. Stop, Ida, we must speak to him."

Mark noticed that although Frank seemed glad to see him, Ida's face did not exhibit much pleasure at the meeting.

"Been here long?" asked Frank.

"Some little time, Frank, but you were so busily engaged you didn't notice me, though I was quite close to you. Well, Ida, enjoying yourself, I hope?"

"Enjoying myself!" exclaimed the girl. "Why, it's out of sight! I wouldn't have missed this carnival for anything in the world."

"I'm going to ask something of you, Ida."

"What is it, Mark?"

"Will you skate 'round the rink with me for awhile?"

"I can't."

"Can't?"

"No. I promised Frank I would skate with him all the evening, and a promise is a promise."

"Oh," laughed Frank, "I'm not so selfish as all that. I mustn't monopolize you. Take a few turns with Mark and I will wait."

Mark Deane had great difficulty in keeping his thoughts to himself, and it was all he could do to refrain from saying something very bitter.

It infuriated him to hear Frank talk in this way, as if he owned Ida, and very curtly he declined to avail himself of Frank's offer.

"Well, as you won't skate with me for a few minutes," said Ida, "it's no good wasting time here. Come on, Frank."

Mark looked after them with an expression of hatred on his face.

"That settles it," he hissed. "I'll stop at nothing now." And away he went to find the schoolmaster.

CHAPTER XV.

FRED ASTONISHES THE CANADIANS—FRANK'S LIFE IN DANGER.

Howard Robson had kept himself very much out of sight. Around the rink were great columns formed of ice, giving the place the appearance of an ice palace, and behind one of these pillars he was standing when Mark found him.

"What a beautiful scene!" said the schoolmaster, sarcastically. "How our friends are enjoying themselves. Why, Frank Fay and Ida seem to be thinking only of their own happiness. They look like a pair of turtle doves."

"Do you want to make me crazy?" shouted Mark. "I'm half mad now, and it wouldn't take much to cause a scene."

"Steady, steady, Mark," said the schoolmaster, trying to calm him. "This sort of thing won't do. If you want to carry through our little plot there must be nothing of this kind. Keep quiet, and still pretend to be Frank's friend. That's what you have to do."

"But we can do nothing," exclaimed Mark. "How can we injure either of the Fays in a place like this without being seen? There's a bigger crowd than I expected to find, and it seems impossible to discover a quiet spot."

"How about where we are standing now?" asked Mr. Robson. "You don't see many people here, do you?"

"None but you and me."

"And I've been here, Mark, for half an hour and had it all to myself."

"Yes, but what can we do here?" asked Mark. "Even if Frank came over here you couldn't touch him, for I suppose you are not foolish enough to think of using a six-shooter."

"Certainly I am not. Whatever happens to Frank Fay tonight must have the appearance of being an accident."

"That would be best."

"Best! Why, there's no other thing possible. Now listen, Mark. I haven't been wasting my time, and I have found the way to do it."

"You?"

"Why not? I suppose I have sufficient intelligence to hit on some plan, haven't I?"

"Tell me what it is," cried Mark angrily, "and please don't have quite so much to say."

The schoolmaster laughed at Mark's words, for he seemed to be in a very good temper. Doubtless the approaching accident to one of the Twins put him in good spirits.

"I won't waste your time. Do you see this column of ice?"

"Of course I do."

"Pretty weighty, isn't it?"

"I should think it weighs nearly a ton."

"Probably more, Mark. Ice is heavy. Now, although it weighs so much it can be moved, because it's topheavy, larger at the head than at the base. One good push and over it goes."

Mark's eyes glistened. He began to understand.

"In order to carry out this scheme, Mr. Robson, Frank must be brought over here."

"And so he can be."

"He won't leave Ida."

"Let her come, too."

Mark gave a cry.

"No, no. I can't have Ida hurt."

"She won't be, Mark. You will be there to see she doesn't come to any injury. Keep her out of danger and lead Frank into it. That's the plan, and it ought to be easy enough to work."

"But who does the rest of the business? Who pushes over the column?"

"That's my affair. I'll see to that. Bring your 'friend' here, and I'll answer for it he won't skate away."

Mark shuddered. He was not quite so bad as Howard Robson, and could not talk of this horrible business in the same cold-blooded manner as the schoolmaster. Through his mind there flashed what might happen. He saw Frank Fay lying crushed and bleeding, perhaps dead, on the ice, beneath the weight of this enormous column. Perhaps if he had not happened to look round and see Frank and Ida pass in the distance, looking the picture of happiness as they skated along, he might have relented. But that one glance settled Frank's fate.

"They shall be here in a few minutes," he said hoarsely, and skated away.

It was easy enough to attract Frank's attention. He and Ida both came over to Mark as soon as they saw him, as they had done before.

Mark skated along quietly by their side, talking as he went.

He was artful, and therefore he concluded it would not be wise to take them to the column of ice at once, so he went slowly round the rink with them two or three times. Then, as he came round the fourth time, instead of continuing, he made his way towards the column, Ida and Frank going with him in order to continue their talk.

"Where's Fred?" asked Mark. "I haven't seen much of him lately."

"Fred's astonishing the Canucks at the other end of the rink, over there where you see that big crowd," answered Ida. "Frank was the star in the afternoon; now it's Fred. The Twins don't seem to get left, do they?"

"But what's Fred doing?"

"The Canadians fancy they're great at figure skating, Mark, and no doubt they are," said Ida. "Well, Fred's met them on their own ground and beaten them. He's cutting double grapevines and all kinds of difficult figures in wonderful fashion, and the girls are crazy about him."

Again Mark's heart was hardened. This praise of the Fays was more than he could endure.

To make matters worse, just as he was on the point of drawing Ida away, so that Howard Robson might throw the ice column on Frank, there was a great shout, and the crowd that had been watching Fred seemed to scatter.

"Why, they're running over here!" cried Ida.

Joe Reed and Annie skated across the rink.

"Some Canadian skater who hasn't been on the ice here tonight has just arrived," explained Joe. "He's challenged Fred to meet him at figure skating, and they're going to compete now."

"Why don't they stay where they are?" asked Mark.

"Because the ice is better here. Do your best, Fred," shouted Joe, "and you'll win."

The crowd formed a circle, and in the middle of it Fred and the Canadian performed the most extraordinary evolutions on their skates, with a precision and grace that was simply wonderful.

The Canadian did everything he knew, setting certain tasks for Fred, which the Timberdale boy executed perfectly.

"Now, it's my turn," said Fred. "Do this."

He then cut a most intricate figure on the ice, and the Canadians, who know what good skating is, shouted with delight.

"That beats me," said the Canadian, taking his defeat very good-naturedly. "You've gone me one better."

"And I can go you a few more if you like. I've several more tricks like that up my sleeve," said Fred, laughingly.

"Show them to the crowd then, for I expect it will please them, but I'm out of the fight. You're a darned sight better than I am, and I admit it."

Fred skated away, and as he did so, most of the people followed him, for they were anxious to see him repeat his performance.

Again Frank, Ida and Mark were alone. Joe Reed had gone off his sister and Harry Pierce to follow Fred.

Mark heard a slight scratching behind the ice column. He knew what it was. The schoolmaster was becoming impatient.

At that particular moment everything was favorable for the carrying out of the dreadful scheme which had been agreed upon.

Frank was standing near the column with his back towards it, looking at Ida and Mark, who were some little distance away.

It is unnecessary to say that Mr. Robson's scheme of injuring Fred with the ice column was frustrated by Fred's going home, and the schoolmaster was disappointed.

But just at this time Fred altered his mind and announced his intention to go home, as he was becoming tired.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MEETING NEAR THE LAKE.

The next day everybody from Timberdale who had been at Maxwell had returned home.

The Fays were greater than ever, and the wonderful performances of the Twins at the skating festival was the sole topic of conversation.

The news spread that there were to be more races at Heron Lake.

"Haven't you heard of it?" cried Joe Reed, as he ran up to a group formed of the Twins, Ida Lester, "Fatty" Fuller and others.

"I was told we were going to have some races next week," said Frank Fay, "but I have no particulars. Have you, Joe?"

"No, but I can say positively that there will be races, for the schoolmaster told me so."

"Then he's arranging the affair, Joe?"

"Looks like it."

"Wonder if there'll be any strangers," said "Fatty" Fuller; "won't be much fun seeing you beat the same people again."

"What are you all chinning about?" exclaimed Mark Deane, as he joined the others.

"We're talking about the races next week."

"Oh! Then you know about that?"

"Of course we do," cried Ida. "You don't suppose you're the only person who hears what's going on, do you, Mark?"

"You bet I don't, but I know something that none of you know."

"And what's that?"

"Have you heard of Jack Dudley?" asked Mark.

"The Western flyer?" exclaimed Frank.

"Shouldn't wonder but what they call him that, for he comes from Minnesota."

"What about him, Mark?" cried the Twins in a breath, showing how interested they were in the subject.

"He's coming here to race next week."

"What?"

"Don't get excited, boys. You heard what I said plain enough. Dudley's going to race at Heron Lake."

The group now dispersed, most of them going home to carry to their parents the great piece of news they had just heard.

Frank and Mark walked away together, for they were quite friendly now, and Frank asked Mark to come in and have supper with him and stay the evening. Mark would have liked to accept the invitation, but he remembered he had promised the schoolmaster to meet him at Heron Lake, and so he could not go with Frank.

"Wish Mr. Robson was a thousand miles away," said Mark to himself. "Guess there'll be a jolly evening at the Fays, and I shall be out of it. By gracious! not much fun in standing on the banks of Heron Lake on a cold night talking to Mr. Robson. However, I'll have to go."

Mark did not wish anyone to see him, and so after supper he avoided the street, and stealing through the woods, was able to leave Timberdale without meeting anybody.

He found the schoolmaster had arrived first. Mr. Robson seemed to be in a disturbed state of mind. He was pacing to and fro near the hut on the edge of the lake.

"Hope I haven't kept you waiting, Mr. Robson," said Mark.

"You'd care a lot if you had," growled the other.

The speech showed that he was in an angry mood, but this did not trouble Mark in the least, for he was used to Mr. Robson's ways.

Finding the schoolmaster kept silence he began the talk.

"Say, you must have brought me here for something," said Mark. "What is it?"

"We must come to an understanding."

"You're not acting straight with me, Deane. You know you're not."

"What's the trouble now? Anything new?"

"Yes," answered the schoolmaster sharply. "When I tell you anything I mean you to keep it to yourself; I don't want it made the talk of the whole town."

"I don't know to what you are referring."

"The races."

"That's no secret," cried Mark. "How could it be! When races are fixed upon, they have to be advertised, so that everybody may know."

"That's right enough, only there's no reason why they should have let the Fays know that Jack Dudley was coming here to race against them. Don't deny that you spread that story."

"I'm not going to do so."

"You can't. Joe Reed told me about it. He had it straight from you."

"But what harm has it done to let Frank and Fred know it? I can't for the life of me see that I've injured you in any way."

"Then you must be stupid; that's all I've got to say. I wanted Frank to believe that he'd have no better man to race against than those he has beaten before. Thanks to you, he knows different now, so he'll take special care with his training."

"I hope he will," cried Mark. "And, I tell you what, Mr. Robson, I hope he'll win."

"What!"

Mark was thoroughly angry now. The schoolmaster's dictatorial ways had annoyed him intensely, and he was tired of being lectured.

"I repeat my words," he said, calmly. "I hope the Fays will win."

"What am I to understand?" asked Mr. Robson. "Have you gone over to the enemy?"

"I'm Frank's friend, I tell you."

"You have turned against me?" hissed the schoolmaster.

"Mr. Robson, you took advantage of my jealousy of the Fays to lead me into all kinds of mischief, in fact crimes."

"Silence!" cried the schoolmaster. "Such talk is dangerous!"

"Well, I'll say no more. I'll have no more to do with any of your schemes, Mr. Robson. I will do nothing more against the Fays."

"You shall!" cried Mr. Robson, beside himself with passion. "You have promised to stick by me, and you shall."

"You're crazy," shouted Mark Deane. "Say another word, and I go straight to Frank Fay and tell him everything."

No sooner had Mark made this incautious speech than Mr. Robson sprang at him.

CHAPTER XVII.

FRANK TO THE RESCUE—RACING ON THE LAKE.

Mark was so astounded by this unexpected attack that he did nothing to defend himself in the strong grasp of the schoolmaster. Then he was powerless to struggle.

Before he realized what was happening, he found himself thrown backward. Off the high bank he rolled, and instead of landing on the thick ice, as it might have been expected he would do, he fell into the water with a great splash.

"Help! Help!" he shouted.

There is no doubt that Mr. Robson would have gone to his assistance if he had not heard some one running towards the spot. He had not meant to hurt Mark, but had been carried away by a sudden access of passion to act as he had done.

Now, he was afraid of the consequences of his act, and quite terror-stricken, he glided into the shed as some one rushed by.

"Who was it called?" said a voice he recognized—it was Frank Fay speaking. "I'm certain I heard some one cry for help."

Frank looked around him as well as the darkness would let him, and listened intently.

"It's in the water!" he cried, suddenly. "I'm sure I heard something moving there."

Instantly the boy sprang down from the bank to the ice, and doing so, he saw that he had landed almost on the edge of a big hole.

"Help!" gasped some one, but very feebly.

"I'll have you out of that in a moment!" cried Frank, distinguishing now the person in the water. "Take my hand; that's right. Good! Now you'll be safe in a minute."

Frank dragged the drowning man out of the water and laid him full length upon the ice. Then he stooped to take a good look at him.

"Mark Deane!" he cried, in amazement. "Why, how ever did you come here, Mark?"

Mr. Robson was listening intently now, wondering whether Mark would betray him.

"I had a fall," said Mark, much to the schoolmaster's relief, "and instead of dropping on the ice, I went into the water."

"Yes, so I see. A fish hole, I reckon, and made to-day, for there was a very thin coating of ice over the surface."

"It was so cold, Frank, it numbed me. Besides, I came up under the ice, and I gave myself up for lost. You saved me, Frank, and I'll never forget it."

"I wonder if the young idiot is about to give me away," muttered the schoolmaster.

"You'd have done the same for me, Mark."

"I'm not sure—at least," said Mark, confusedly, "there was a time when I don't believe I would. I was so jealous of you, Frank, that I did pretty mean things against you, for instance——"

Frank stopped him.

"I won't listen. If you want to accuse yourself you must do it to some one else, not to me. Let bygones be bygones; for the future you and I will be friends."

"True friends!" cried Mark, grasping Frank's hand. "There's my hand on it."

"Well," said Frank, laughingly, "as we're friends, I'm going to give you a bit of friendly advice. You're wet through and cold. If you don't want to have an attack of pneumonia, you better run home as hard as you can go, and get straight into bed. I'll go with you."

The schoolmaster walked home turning this matter over in his mind, for, as he had said, it was a very serious situation for him. Mark Deane might completely ruin him if he spoke out. His only safeguard was that the boy might hesitate to do so, fearing the consequences to himself.

Going in his house he found a telegram from Jack Dudley, saying he was leaving Minneapolis at once, and would certainly be at Timberdale to take part in the races.

This somewhat restored the schoolmaster's temper, and he went to bed to dream of Frank Fay's defeat.

Two days before the race Jack Dudley arrived at Timberdale, much to Mr. Robson's surprise. Indeed, everyone in the town was astonished, but, as Dudley himself explained, there was really nothing to excite this feeling.

"It's only natural I should want to see the lake," he said, "and have a spin on it."

CHAPTER XVIII.

FRANK RECEIVES AN ALARMING TELEGRAM.

The day of the great race at Heron Lake, as Frank was out practicing on his skates a man, whom he recognized as his father's hired man, approached him.

"A telegram for you, Master Frank," said the man, "and I brought it right up."

"Something from pop," laughed Frank, as he tore the envelope open. "Guess he's thinking about the race and wants to have any news sent to him. What's this?" gasped Frank, turning very pale and staggering as he spoke.

"Read it! Read it!" cried Ida.

A mist seemed to come over Frank's eyes, blurring everything.

"Take it, Ida. See for yourself," said the boy.

"Come at once. Father's dangerously ill."

The message was sent by Mr. Lawrence, of Houlton, with whom Mr. Fay was staying.

"This is awful," cried Frank. "I shall never see my father again. Ida, I suspect he's worse than the telegram says. Perhaps dead."

"Hope for the best," said Ida, her eyes filling with tears, "there's a dear boy."

"Master Frank," said George, "there's no time to lose."

"Eh? What?" cried Frank, in a bewildered way. "What do you mean?"

"You must go to your father at once," said George. "I have a rig waiting, and if you jump in you'll make the train. If you miss it, you can't get away to-night."

"That's good advice, George. I'll follow it. Good-by, Ida," said Frank, almost heart-broken. "Tell Fred what has happened, won't you?"

"Yes, Frank. Good-by, and keep up your spirits. Something tells me you will receive good news soon."

Ida stood completely bewildered as she watched Frank driven away, and only the shouts of her companions as they drew near aroused her from her reverie.

"Star-gazing, Ida?" cried Joe Reed, laughingly.

"You can't look at stars in the daytime," retorted young Pierce.

"Well, then, perhaps you and Frank have had a fight. Ah! that's it, is it?"

"Joe, this is no time for joking," said Ida, seriously. "Frank is in great trouble. He's had a telegram to say that his father is dangerously sick, and he has just taken the train to Houlton."

"My father in danger!" cried Fred Fay. "I must go, too!"

"You can't!" exclaimed Mark Deane, taking him by the arm and drawing him aside. "There is not another train to-night. Fred, I don't believe a word of it."

"What! You don't think my father is sick?"

"No. It is a plot on the part of Howard Robson to keep Frank out of the race to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIX.

A VISIT TO MR. ROBSON'S—THE RESULT OF THE INTERVIEW.

"A plot to prevent Frank from racing to-morrow," cried Fred Fay as he listened to Mark Dean's words. "Well, better that, than that my father's life should be in danger."

"That's true enough, Fred," said Mark, "but if it is a plot let us find out and defeat it."

"We may be in time to stop Frank!" cried Joe Reed. "If we run we may catch the train."

"We will try, anyway," exclaimed Fred. "Good-by, girls!"

Nodding to Ida and the others, Fred, Mark and Joe set off from the lake in the sleigh, having left most of the party behind in order to lighten it. The horses flew over the road, and the distance to Timberdale was made in very quick time. However, it was too late. Frank had left Timberdale for Houlton nearly fifteen minutes before they reached the station.

"What is to be done now?" asked Joe Reed.

"The first thing is to find out whether my father is really sick or not," said Fred. "I will send a telegram to him at once."

"A good idea. When we get the answer we shall be sure of what is going on," said Mark.

The boys waited very anxiously for the reply from Mr. Fay, and when it came Mark and Joe looked over Fred's shoulder as he tore open the envelope.

"Thank Heaven for that!" cried Fred, with a sigh of relief. "My dear father is well. He says: 'What do you mean? Never felt better in my life. Am just starting for Timberdale, for I want to see Frank win to-morrow!'"

"There's no longer any doubt!" cried Mark. "The schoolmaster and his friends are at work, and they are determined that Frank shall not have a chance. Now we must beat them. We ought to be able to do that."

"Frank will take the next train back when he discovers his mistake," said Fred.

"Yes, but there isn't another train to-night," said Joe Reed, who had been examining the schedule.

"Then Frank must take the first train to-morrow morning," cried Mark.

"That won't do. The first train in the morning from Houlton reaches here at 10:30. Too late! for the race starts at ten o'clock."

"I have it!" cried Fred. "We'll go to the schoolmaster's. Mr. Robson is sure to be home, and, no doubt, Dudley is with

him. When we explain what has happened, they can't possibly refuse to postpone the race for an hour. That will be enough time."

"Guess you're right, Fred," said Mark. "No doubt the schoolmaster would like to refuse, but for the look of the thing he dare not."

Mr. Robson exhibited no surprise when the boys called upon him. It happened that Jack Dudley, Pete Carson and Bill Elliott arrived at the house at the same time. They had been having some skating practice on a small lake near the town.

It was arranged that Fred should do all the talking, for it was quite certain that any words Mark Deane might say would only irritate Mr. Robson and the others, who regarded him as a traitor, he having left them to act with the Twins.

"I suppose you have heard the news, Mr. Robson?" began Fred.

"No, really, I have heard nothing," answered the schoolmaster, with an air of surprise that could not have been surpassed by the most finished comedian on the stage. Mr. Robson was on his guard, for he felt that Mark was watching him narrowly.

"Frank has left Timberdale, having received a telegram saying pop was ill."

"Fay, I am sincerely sorry to hear that."

"Thank you for your sympathy, Mr. Robson. You'll be very glad to hear that there's nothing the matter with my father."

"What!"

The schoolmaster was not sufficiently master of himself to receive this information calmly, and he bit his lips with vexation when he saw Mark Deane looking at him with a mocking smile on his lips.

"It was a foolish hoax," Fred continued, "and when I telegraphed to my father I had a satisfactory reply at once."

"Well, Fay, I have to congratulate you that all has ended so happily."

"But it hasn't, sir. The trouble is that Frank can't get back in time to race at ten o'clock to-morrow, because there is no train."

The four plotters could no longer conceal the joy they felt. Besides, as Frank could not get back, it was not necessary to exhibit so much caution as they had hitherto done. The battle was practically over, and Jack Dudley would win to-morrow with the greatest ease, for Fred Fay would be his only opponent.

"The fortunes of war, Fay," said Mr. Robson, smiling, in reply to Fred's last remark. "I'm very sorry for your brother, but I don't see what can be done."

"There's an easy way out of the difficulty, sir. Why not postpone the race for an hour?"

"Impossible. That's not fair to the other competitors."

"Thunder! Never heard of such a thing," said Carson.

"Can't be done, boss," observed Elliott. "I've been in sports of all kinds for ten years, and it's the nerviest proposal I ever tumbled against."

"But if the other competitors agree," persisted Fred, "what harm is done? There are only two, myself and Dudley. Now, I consent cheerfully to a postponement. What do you say, Dudley?"

The schoolmaster, fearful that Dudley would give way, kicked him under the table as a sign to him to be firm.

"Sorry, Mr. Fay," said Dudley, after a moment's hesitation, "but it's impossible."

"Impossible! Surely not," answered Fred. "But if it is you must have a reason for it."

"A reason! Guess I have," muttered Dudley, in a perplexed way.

"I think we have a right to ask what it is," said Joe Reed, speaking for the first time.

"Dudley's reason is——" began Mr. Robson, coming to the rescue of his associate.

"Excuse me," interrupted Mark, quickly, "but we should like Dudley to speak for himself."

"You will either hear my answer or none at all!" cried the schoolmaster, hotly. "The reason why Dudley can't consent to a postponement is because he has to leave Timberdale by the 11:30 train in order to reach Cleveland in time to race there to-morrow."

"Just what I was going to say, observed Dudley, "if I'd had time."

The boys felt that they were beaten. If Dudley was really going to race at Cleveland next day he was bound to make the 11:30 train, and they were unable to contradict the statement that had been made.

"So you won't change the time of the race?" said Fred, making a last effort.

"How can it be done, Fay? You must pardon me for wishing you good-night now, but these friends of mine must be needing their suppers. I can only hope, Fred, that your brother, somehow or other, may reach Heron Lake in time to race. Good-night."

As the boys were filing out of the room, sounds of laughter, suppressed it is true, reached their ears. Mr. Robson and his guests were enjoying their triumph in advance. Their mirth infuriated Mark, who was more angry about the affair than Fred himself was.

He turned round at the door, and faced the schoolmaster with a defiant look on his face.

"Mr. Robson!" he cried, "your tool hasn't won this race yet, and I tell you right here to your face that he will be beaten!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE BOYS HOLD A COUNCIL—MR. ROBSON SENDS ANOTHER TELEGRAM TO FRANK.

"That's about as mean a fellow as I ever met," said Fred, when they were outside.

"Yes, Mr. Robson's mean enough," answered Joe Reed, "but he's mighty cute. By gracious! that was smart of him to invent that race at Cleveland right on the spur of the moment, for, of course, there wasn't a word of truth in it. Still, it answered its purpose, for after that we couldn't claim a postponement, could we? We're up against a hot game, boys, and don't you forget it."

"Yes, but they haven't won yet," said Mark Deane. "I told them they couldn't, and that's what made them laugh so."

Walking along the road, Fred and Joe had a talk to themselves. Joe was suggesting that after all, it was possible that Fred himself might win if he really tried his utmost.

"It can't be, Joe," said Fred. "Ten miles is not my distance. It's too long for me, and I don't mind admitting that Dudley is better than I am over such a long race."

Here they met Ida, who had been to the Fay homestead to find out whether any further news had come from Houlton respecting Mr. Fay's condition. She was overjoyed to hear that there was nothing the matter with him, but very angry when she discovered the fraud that had been practiced upon Frank, and still angrier when they told her that Frank could not possibly get back in the morning in time to race.

"But haven't you done anything?" cried Ida.

"There's no train, Ida."

"Pshaw! You boys are very fine creatures, I know; you are stronger than we girls, but our wit can solve difficulties your dull brains can't see through."

"That's rubbing it in, Ida," laughed Joe. "But I can survive worse talk than that even, if you'll only show us how to help Frank."

"Why stop him, of course!" cried Ida. "That ought to have occurred to you in a moment. Send a telegram and it will be delivered on the train."

"Goodness!" cried Joe Reed, "but that can be done."

"Done! of course it can," said Ida.

"But how does it assist us?" asked Fred Fay. "By this time Frank has got so far that he will not be able to take the train coming from Houlton to-night. Wherever he is, when our telegram reaches him, he must stay till morning, and then take the train that arrives here too late to be any good."

Ida had no plan that could assist in any way, and it seemed as if her suggestion was of no good, in the face of the objections that Fred raised against it.

"Here comes 'Fatty' Fuller!" cried Joe Reed. "Perhaps his mighty brain can pull us through. Listen, 'Fatty,' here's a chance for you to show your ability," and he told "Fatty" the whole story.

"Fatty" listened with a perfectly grave face to everything. of his stupidity had not been beyond question they might have thought his serious face concealed a mine of wisdom.

"Hush! the oracle's going to speak!" cried Joe, holding up his hand for silence, as "Fatty", having swallowed a piece of pie he had been eating, showed signs that he was about to speak.

"I think," said "Fatty", solemnly, "that our best plan is to prevent the race taking place."

"Hear him!" exclaimed Joe. "He's a wonder."

"Go on 'Fatty,'" said Ida. "Don't you mind him. He's jealous of you. Finish what you were going to say."

"I think the best plan," continued "Fatty," solemnly, "is to break up the ice on the lake!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" they shouted at this wise advice.

"Go home, 'Fatty,' and eat, there's a good fellow," said Joe. "You don't look well; you're looking thin."

So "Fatty," wondering what had excited their laughter, left them to discuss the difficult problem.

"See here," said Mark Deane, who spoke after a very long silence, "I believe I see my way through our trouble. It's possible we may get Frank in time."

"Yes, yes," all cried, interested at once.

"I've calculated that our telegram will reach Frank at a place called Big Lake, which he will reach about eleven o'clock. Now what's to prevent him driving back here. If he travels all night he can do so."

"Hurrah!" cried Joe. "That gets us out of our fix. But, say, where's he to get the rig from?"

"Money will do anything, and Frank won't mind what he spends to get here. Come along, we'll send a telegram at once."

Mark's plan was decided to be feasible. In fact it was the only way in which Frank could return. True, he would not be in good condition for racing after traveling all night, but they had such confidence in Frank that they believed, in spite of this drawback, that he would win if he arrived in time.

That night they went to bed feeling far happier than they had anticipated would be the case.

At eleven o'clock that night Mr. Robson and his friends heard what had been done, and they were disagreeably surprised at the news.

"Something must be done at once," said the schoolmaster, as he and the three skaters discussed the matter.

"I don't think we need worry," observed Elliott. "You know

what the roads are like. It's absurd to think he'll get here in time."

"That's where you are wrong," retorted Carson. "If he gets the rig he'll do it."

"But, say," said Dudley, "I don't believe he'll leave Big Lake."

"Why not?"

"Because, Mr. Robson," continued Dudley, "when he receives the telegram he won't believe it. He'll think it's some trick and he'll go right on."

"There's something in that," said the schoolmaster, thoughtfully, "and I tell you what we can do to puzzle him still more. We will send another telegram telling him to go right on. With these two telegrams he'll be in such a state he won't know what to do."

"Yes, but who's going to send that telegram? You may depend upon it that the office in Timberdale is watched by that cuss Deane," said Carson. "If we go near it he'll be on to our game at once."

"Therefore we won't go near it. You shall ride over to Debeck and send the telegram from there. Take my horse, Carson, go out the back way and you'll be quite safe. No one will see you."

Carson fell in with this plan at once, and he lost no time in saddling the horse and departing. By riding horseback he was able to go by the bride path through the wood, and this was a great saving in distance, cutting off nearly two miles.

Strange to say, Carson did not notice some one standing near the back entrance to Mr. Robson's house, nor did he notice a shrill cry which was soon after heard. Yet if he had been vigilant he should have remarked both incidents.

The cry was caused by Joe Reed, who had been watching the schoolmaster's house at the back, and it was a signal to Mark Deane, who was further down in the town towards the wood.

Mark, seeing the horseman, guessed at once that he was making for the wood, so he darted into it, hoping to intercept him, and find out who it was that was riding so late at night. Carson passed so near Mark that the boy was able to identify him without any difficulty.

"He's going to Debeck!" exclaimed Mark. "And I guess I know what for. It will be a hard run, but I think I can do it."

The horseman was not able to ride in such a direct line as Mark was at liberty to do, being on foot, and for some little while he could not gallop fast, owing to the nature of the ground. The consequence was that Mark got to Debeck first, and when Carson opened the door of the telegraph office he nearly sank to the floor. There stood Mark Dean smiling at him.

CHAPTER XXI.

CONCLUSION.

"Good-evening, Mr. Carson," said Mark, smiling, "or perhaps I ought to say good-evening again, as we've already met to-night. Very pleased to see you."

Carson showed that he was not pleased to see Mark, but he said nothing, contenting himself with mumbling a few words, for he was quite at a loss to know what to do. However, Mark came to his rescue.

"You first, by all means, Mr. Carson," said Mark, politely. "Send your telegram first, I will wait."

Carson said something that did not sound exactly like a blessing, and Mark laughed in his face as he walked towards the door, the operator looking on in amazement at this strange scene.

Carson slammed the door violently, got on his horse and rode away.

"That man will be back," said Mark to the operator, "and will want you to send a telegram to Frank Fay for him. Now, don't you do it," and after Mark had explained the nature of the plot against Frank, the operator said he would refuse to send the message and take the consequences whatever they might be.

Mark was quite right in his surmise that Carson would return. He hitched his horse up, and finding Mark was not in the room, he went in. No sooner had he done so than Mark sprang out, unhitched the horse, jumped into the saddle, and galloped off.

Carson rushed to the door when he heard the noise, and was just in time to see Mark turn in the saddle and wave his hand to him.

"Pleasant walk, Mr. Carson!" shouted Mark. "Don't worry. I'll let your friends know where you are."

And Mark actually stopped at the schoolmaster's, handed over the horse to him, told him what had happened at Debeck, and went away, leaving Mr. Robson, Elliott and Dudley in a most towering rage.

In spite of the failure of this last attempt against Frank, Mr. Robson and the others still had hopes that he would not reach Timberdale in time for the race.

They went up to Heron Lake at half-past nine, and found that a large crowd had assembled to witness the affair, people having ridden a great distance in order to see Dudley race against the Fays.

It was soon rumored that Frank would not be there, and this seemed to deprive the contest of all interest, for it was admitted by everyone that Fred could not beat Dudley at this distance.

Ida Lester, her girl friends, Joe Reed, Harry Pierce, "Fatty" Fuller and the others were all there, with their eyes fixed on the road that led from Timberdale to the lake. Every time a rig came in sight there would be a shout.

"That's him!" cried the boys and girls excitedly, only to be perfectly silent a few minutes later when they discovered their mistake.

Mr. Robson's hopes were almost certainties now. It wanted less than ten minutes to ten, and at ten o'clock the race was to be started.

"He won't get here!" he exclaimed.

"If he does he'll be fit for nothing," answered Elliott.

Carson and Dudley were skating together on the lake, the latter taking things very easy, and Fred Fay was near the

starting post, for he meant to race even if Frank did not appear.

The only thing that worried Mr. Robson was Mark Deane's absence. This he could not account for, and as he knew by experience what Mark's nature was the schoolmaster realized that Mark was keeping up the fight to the last.

"But after all, what can he do?" he asked.

"Nothing, boss," replied Elliott. "The money's in your pocket just as sure as if the race had been run."

"I am sure I hope so," answered the schoolmaster, turning deadly pale at the thought of losing his bets. "If I don't win, as you know, Elliott, I'm a ruined man."

"What's the time, boss?" asked Elliott.

"Three minutes to ten."

"Three minutes!" echoed Elliott. "Then you can't lose. Dudley's a winner as much as if he'd raced. See here, Mr. Robson, you can look down that Timberdale road for a great way."

"That's so, Elliott!" cried the schoolmaster with a smiling face. "And there's not a vehicle of any kind in sight. It would take seven minutes driving fast to reach here from the turn of the road. I'm safe. Fay, Dudley," cried Mr. Robson. "Better get to the post. It wants less than two minutes of ten."

"Look! Look!" exclaimed Ida Lester, excitedly, directing the attention of those near her to an entirely different part of the lake.

A rig had just come out of the forest road, and a figure could be seen in it, standing up, whip in hand, urging on a team of horses in a most energetic fashion.

The schoolmaster saw, and as he looked he staggered as if he was taken by a fit, and he would have fallen to the ice if Elliott had not reached out his arms and supported him.

"It's Mark Deane!" he gasped, with white lips.

Then recovering himself with a desperate effort, he made a last attempt to start the race.

"Ten o'clock!" he cried.

"No, no, schoolmaster," shouted a crowd of farmers. "Let's have fair play. It wants a minute to ten."

"No matter," muttered Mr. Robson. "He can't get his skates on in time."

On to the ice dashed Mark Deane, and then a tremendous cheer was heard, for everybody recognized Frank Fay sitting in the wagon.

Suddenly Mark pulled up his team, and instantly Frank jumped up and threw off the furs in which he was wrapped.

Then, as his friends cheered again, he dropped from the wagon to the ice, and everyone saw that he had his skates on. This was due to Mark, who had driven out to meet him with a fresh pair of horses, taking Frank's skates with him.

Frank was at the post now, looking pale and somewhat exhausted, but determined, and when the pistol was fired he, Dudley and Fred got off together to an excellent start.

Fred, as usual, soon went ahead, and when four miles had been run Frank was fully two hundred yards behind Dudley, who gradually gained on him all the time.

At six miles Frank was three hundred yards in the rear, and Fred was only fifty yards in front of Dudley.

Elliott and Carson arrived at the conclusion that Frank would be beaten, owing to his long night journey.

"He's bound to be, boss," said Carson, cheerfully. "If he'd kept up with Dudley he might have won, but you bet he can't make up three hundred yards in the state he's in."

Mr. Robson was not comforted much by these remarks, for he had had proof on several occasions of what Frank was capable, and he knew the race was not won until the winning post was reached.

Frank was seen to be making an effort now, and at seven miles he had gained so much that he was only two hundred yards to the bad, but strange to say, the beginning of the last miles found the relative positions of Dudley and Frank were unchanged.

"I wish he'd fall and smash himself!" muttered the schoolmaster, still distrustful, and at the moment he made this reflection, Frank started ahead as if he was shot from an arrow.

"Frank wins!" was the shout now, and passing Dudley at the beginning of the last lap, the famous Timberdale flyer skated in a winner by fifty yards.

* * * * *

Mr. Fay, after the race was over, determined to give the schoolmaster what he called "a piece of his mind," but in the confusion Mr. Robson had left the lake.

He left Timberdale, too, before any of the spectators of the race returned to the town, and he was never seen again. Thus, his subsequent career is involved in doubt, but it is certain that he will end badly unless a great alteration takes place in his mode of life.

With the disappearance of the schoolmaster a happier state of things prevailed in the town, for there was no one left to stir up feelings of jealousy in the minds of the boys and girls there against the TIMBERDALE TWINS.

Next week's issue will contain "THE BOY FROM TOMBSTONE; OR, THE BOSS OF A 'BAD' TOWN," by An Old Scout.

SPECIAL NOTICE. All back numbers of this weekly except the following are in print: 1 to 25, 27, 29 to 36, 38 to 40, 42, 43, 45 to 51, 53 to 55, 57 to 60, 62, 64 to 69, 71 to 73, 75, 79, 81, 84 to 86, 88, 89, 91, 92 to 94, 99, 100, 102, 105, 107, 109 to 111, 116, 119, 124 to 126, 132, 139, 140, 143, 163, 166, 171, 179 to 181, 192, 212, 213, 215, 216, 233, 239, 247, 257, 265, 268, 277, 294. If you cannot obtain the ones you want from any newsdealer, send the price in money or postage stamps by mail to FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 24 UNION SQUARE, New York, and you will receive the copies you order by return mail.

AN IRON-BOUND KEG

OR, THE ERROR THAT COST A LIFE

By ALEXANDER ARMSTRONG

(CHAPTER XVI—Continued)

There came a soft patter of footsteps.

The dwarf had heard him, and was softly approaching the window to look out and see what occasioned the slight noise Ned had made when he slipped.

The detective took alarm instantly, and glided around to the back of the hut where he crouched down.

He was none too quick, for Sam rushed out of the door the moment he had disappeared.

He glanced around, and seeing nothing, he went first to one side of the hut and then to the other.

Still no sign of anyone.

"I'll bet it was a bat. But I heard something," he muttered suspiciously. "Then again it may be a prowler; at all events I'll run around the hut and be sure."

He whizzed along the side like a shadow, but Ned heard him coming, and darted around to the opposite side, and as he knew that Sam was still coming on in pursuit, he kept on to the front.

He became very cautious then to prevent himself from slipping, as he had done before, and as he came to the broken window he peered in.

A single room met his view.

There was a wooden table and bench in it, a closet in one corner, the door of which stood ajar, and a small lamp on the table, diffusing a light around the interior.

Upon the floor was stood the missing keg.

Upon the impulse of the moment Ned darted in through the open door, fled to the closet and stepped inside.

He fell down into a hole.

For an instant he imagined it was a bottomless well but he only sank to his hips, and then his feet touched bottom.

This was the hiding place of the keg, no doubt.

He pulled the closet door shut, and heard Sam going around the hut at a run.

It was evident that he was utterly ignorant of the fact that Ned had entered the hut.

Several moments passed by.

Then Sam entered the abode.

He was puffing and blowing, and sat down to rest.

Alone, as he imagined he was, he began to mutter to himself in disjointed sentences.

The detective could distinctly hear every word, and chuckled inwardly at the success of his action.

"Ay, ay! Fooled—no one," Sam was saying. "Safe—keg all right—can go on. I'll open it, and—but what is the use? No one here—still curious myself after all these years—after all these years."

There was a wide crack at the bottom of the closet door, and as soon as Ned saw it he stooped over, and peering through, he had an uninterrupted view of the interior of the apartment Sam occupied.

The ugly little wretch sat on the bench wiping his brow on a red bandanna handkerchief, and glaring at the keg which stood in front of him.

He held a cobble stone in his hand.

The detective saw that he was debating in his mind whether to smash in the head of the keg or not.

If he did so the contents would be exposed.

That was just what Ned wanted to see and pondered.

It made Ned more impatient and curious.

"Why don't he open it?" he thought.

Then he got a start of surprise.

Sam began to talk to himself in this strain:

"What's the use?—ay, ay, what's the use? I'd better put it back in the hole in the floor of the closet again."

"Heavens! he would crush me and see me," thought Ned.

"It is safe there," continued Sam, with a sage nod. "It is as safe as a bank. Why should I disturb it? I was born and raised in his hut. I know that all people shun it. No one ever comes here. So it would be safest here, I say. I fooled the detectives nicely. They thought I was going to stay in Scotch Plains—I know I went there with it. But I was too smart for them when I hired a wagon and carried it here."

He chuckled to himself as if hugely pleased.

Then he suddenly raised the stone and dealt the head of the keg a violent blow that made it ring.

"He is going to open it after all!" thought Ned.

His excitement intensified so that he fairly trembled with eager expectancy as he peered at his ungainly little enemy.

"I'll have a peep at its contents," Sam muttered. "I can't restrain my curiosity much longer."

He rained a shower of blows on the top, but the head was well set in, the stone bounced, he hurt his hand, and then examined the wood.

"Tough as blazes!" he growled.

He picked up the stone again as he had dropped it and began to bang at the top once more.

A hollow echo followed each blow.

The dwarf frowned and increased the force of his blows.

Then there came a cracking sound, and an ejaculation of satisfaction pealed from his lips.

One of the boards had been split.

Another shower of blows followed.

They loosened the board in the middle, and he caught hold of it and pulled it out.

To remove the other pieces of wood was but the work of a moment for the eager man.

The head of the keg was then all out.

Sam grew intensely excited.

He thrust his hand into the keg, tore away some pieces of newspaper, and then fell back in his seat with a long legal-looking document clutched tightly in his hand.

(Continued on page 31)

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(Continued from page 28.)

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DWARF'S VISION.

The culmination of Ned Rigg's idea had almost been reached when Sam held up the document he had taken out of the keg, and a thrill passed over him.

The dwarf drew the lamp over nearer to him with a trembling hand, opened out the paper, put a pair of eye glasses on, and began to read the paper.

Read it, we said, but that term is scarcely the right one, for Sam Bull was evidently a man of very limited education, for he had to spell out every word, letter by letter, in a monotone, and ponder over its meaning long before he could decide in his mind just what the word meant.

On the other hand, the detective grasped at the recitation at once, and in a moment he comprehended that the paper in question was a legal will.

It occupied Sam over an hour to grasp the full context of the paper in his mind, and then the whole secret of the contents of the keg was made clear to the listening detective.

The paper then, in brief, was the last will and testament of Clara Greenwood, by which she bequeathed to her only heiress and daughter, Grace, the sum of two hundred thousand dollars.

One person was nominated guardian of this fortune.

He was her second cousin, Sam Bull.

For his care of the girl as guardian, when she came of legal age, he was to receive the sum of ten thousand dollars, and pay over to the girl the balance of one hundred and ninety thousand dollars.

The fortune was divided into three parts.

Of these parts, one consisted of one hundred thousand dollars in United States government bonds, drawing an interest of four per cent, which interest was to be left untouched until the settlement was duly made.

The second part was invested in railroad stocks to the amount of fifty thousand dollars, the dividends on which were also to remain untouched until the final settlement was made to the girl.

The third part was a matter of fifty thousand dollars, half in gold and half in diamond jewelry.

The bonds, the stocks, the gold and the jewels were all packed in the keg, in which, with the will, they were to have been deposited in a safe deposit vault.

But Sam Bull had never complied with his orders.

He had retained the iron-bound keg in his own possession from the time it was first intrusted to his care by the poor, misguided, dying woman, and although he had often before been tempted to open it and ascertain what was in it, he was invariably withheld by a feeling that some misfortune would befall him if he did.

There was nothing strange in this presentiment.

The dying woman said it would be so if he failed to comply honestly with the trust she left him.

And the words had such a pathetic ring that he could never quite eradicate the matter from his mind.

He was superstitious to a certain degree.

Perhaps that had something to do with it.

So he withheld his curiosity until he became plunged in crime, and then the morbid feeling drove all his superstitious fears out of his mind.

The result was that he opened the keg.

But there was a fatal curse put upon him by a dying woman, which needed only just such an action on his part as this to see it fearfully realized.

The moment he had deciphered the will he suddenly recalled to mind what Mrs. Greenwood said to him.

He sprang to his feet, shivering like an aspen.

He glanced around the room with a feeling of dread, and his ugly little eyes blazed with a wild, maniacal light.

Not a sound but the wind rustling the foliage of the trees and shrubbery met his hearing.

Not a soul was to be seen watching him.

And yet a horrible feeling was stealing over him as if an icy hand had clutched him by the heart and was trying to tear it out by the roots.

A frightful dread was making his brain throb and his pulse quicken, and he knew—he felt—he could swear—that the blighting curse of the dying woman had fallen upon him, and that he was doomed.

He glanced at the fatal keg.

It had a terrible fascination for him.

It seemed to form into a fiery cloud, surrounded by a smoky film, and a myriad of demons played in and out of the mist, threatening him with many violent gestures.

There seemed to come a frightful explosion.

The strange film parted in the body of the keg and in its place it left a strange scene.

There was his cellar—the open trap in the floor—the hole in the wall through which the detective was peering—the masked burglar—he himself springing at Bank Note Bill—the thrust of the murderous knife—the death!

The scene grew brighter, more lurid, and it seared itself into his brain as if branded with a red-hot iron.

He could look at it no longer, and a piteous moan broke from his lips, as with bulging eyes he reeled back with his hands clasped wildly to his temples.

Oh, the agony of mind that fearful scene scorched him with as that awful picture roared up into a terrible flame, in the midst of which he saw a solitary gallows, as black as ink, looming out with startling vividness, and the hangman fastening the noosed rope around his neck, preparatory to his execution.

A wild yell, fairly beast-like, broke the stillness.

"I'm a devil!" he howled frantically.

His knotted, muscular face was drawn as if the stiffness of death's rigor was tugging at it, his thick lips rolled back, the corners of his nose were expanded, and a rugged frown settled upon his coldly sweating brow.

Palsey could only be a mild form of trembling compared to the way in which his nerves and muscles twitched and shook, and the spasmodic way in which his crooked and deformed body writhed and bent itself.

"I'm a devil!" he hoarsely panted again.

Then he groaned, and groaned, and groaned, and, covering his contorted face with his trembling hands, he shut out the mad vision that his imagination had called up with such startling effect.

He rocked his body to and fro, and he whined and groaned, and gabbled, and whispered, and gradually he got worse and worse, and he became so much beside himself that he knew nothing about where he was, or what he had done.

It was an appalling frame of mind to get in, and only a person of his savage passions and ferocious temperament could work himself into such a fit.

Then gradually his reason began to return little by little, and he began to think rationally again, and the remembrance of the keg dawned on his mind.

"She said I would die a frightful death if I misplaced the trust she reposed in me!" he muttered hollowly.

He was badly scared.

But he was inordinately avaricious.

His selfish fear caused him to take up the will, thrust it in the keg again, and picking the loosened board up from the

floor, with the cobble stone, he pounded it into the head of the keg again.

"No, no, no!" Ned heard him gasp. "I love the gold, by heavens, but I love myself far better! I'll put it back in the hole in the closet, an' I'll leave it there until I am not so unnerved again. Then I'll come back and get it. I'll defy the arch fiend. I'll defy the world! Ho, ho, ho! I'll defy the world!"

He finished heading up the keg, and dropped the stone.

Ned began to feel uneasy.

"I am as good as discovered!" he gasped.

He wanted to get up out of the hole, as he did not fancy the idea of the keg being thrown in on top of him.

But he peered out again, in hopes that Sam might change his mind at the last moment.

His heart sank, for Sam had picked it up in his long powerful arms, and was staggering toward the closet with it.

The detective drew himself together for a struggle, and a moment later the closet door was kicked open by Sam.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FALL.

A wild yell of terror from Sam Bull, a crash as the iron-bound keg struck the floor when it fell out of the hunchback's hands, and a scramble as the detective jumped up out of the hole in the closet.

That was what happened.

It only occupied a second of time.

And before the detective got out in the room the scared dwarf had rushed across the room toward the door, thoroughly convinced that he had seen a ghost.

The detective saw his advantage, and made a rush for him. Sam, unluckily glanced back over his shoulder, and did not see the bench standing directly in his way until he stumbled over it and went down with a crash.

He landed flat upon his face, but he turned around quickly and glanced up to see who the stranger was.

He was soon satisfied on this point.

"The detective!" he cried.

Then he almost collapsed.

"Yes, Sam Bull, the detective, your foe."

Sam was almost overwhelmed with consternation.

He made an attempt to get upon his feet, but Ned saw what he was doing, and darting forward, he caught him by the arms and shoved him back.

"Stay where you are," said he decisively.

"I won't! Let me up!"

"Stay where you are, I say!"

"By heavens, I'll——"

"You will do nothing."

"By the powers, if you don't let go——"

"Keep still! If you keep struggling I'll hit you."

"What do you want?"

He ceased fighting as he asked this.

"In the first place, I am going to arrest you."

"Arrest me? What for?"

"Attempting to murder me by pushing me off the ferry boat."

"I didn't!"

"But I saw you do it."

"Well, curse me if I am not sorry I failed to drown you."

"That is a devout wish! But you failed."

"My chance to avenge myself will yet come."

"Never! In the next place I want this keg."

"But you never will get it."

"Oh, yes I shall. I heard what you read."

"Ha, the will——"

"Yes, the will. Your rascality is flagrant."

"Oh!" groaned Sam, in dismay.

"That fortune," continued Ned, "must go to Grace Greenwood."

"She shall never get it."

"Oh, yes, she will. I've got the upper hand now."

"But it won't last long."

"You may think so; I don't. Then she will fight you."

"Fight me?"

"In court. Money will aid her to prove her innocence."

"No power on earth can prove she didn't murder her father."

"Oh, you infernal wretch! But you shall see."

"Let me up!"

"Hold on! You might get violent. I'll handcuff you."

Sam didn't like the idea evidently, for he fought and struggled with savage desperation to get away.

"Now there is no use," said Ned. "I've got you."

"But not for long!" yelled the dwarf.

His hand came in contact with the stone with which he had broken the keg open.

The detective did not see him pick it up, but he felt it when Sam dealt him a powerful blow with it on the side, and Ned was knocked sprawling.

The breath was knocked out of him.

Up jumped the dwarf like a flash, and with one bound he reached the door, and ran out.

Ned quickly arose to his feet.

He was not so badly disabled that he did not realize what was happening about him.

He recovered his breath, and started after Bull.

When he got to the door he saw the dwarf rush in amid the trees, and he unhesitatingly followed.

But Sam not only had the advantage of a long start, but he was not disabled, while the detective had the utmost difficulty in going at a pace faster than a walk.

Still Ned was not discouraged.

He kept recovering his respiration.

By the time he reached the margin of the woods again, he was all right again, and ready and eager to pursue and capture the ugly little dwarf.

Sam had given Ned no end of trouble.

The officer was greatly nettled over it, and meant to put the villain *hors du combat* with the quickest possible dispatch by making prisoner of him.

But Sam was as slippery as an eel.

The detective saw the dim outlines of the figure as he glided in amid the trees, and saw that he was proceeding with the utmost difficulty, as the weeds, trees, bushes and roots, rocks and vines and saplings in the way had a tendency to trip and hold him back.

Moreover, the stunted stature of the dwarf gave him the advantage over Ned by being able to pass through the undergrowth much the fastest of the two.

Consequently he rapidly widened the breach between them, and began to disappear from the officer's sight in the dense gloom of the moonless night beyond.

It would not be a difficult matter for him to give Ned the slip in such a place, and he seemed to realize it too, after awhile, for he saw at what an advantage he had placed himself, and made up his mind to increase it by resort to more rapid work.

The way he went on fairly astonished Ned.

It seemed as if he was actually greased.

(This story to be continued in our next issue.)

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